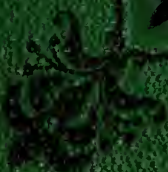




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RICHARD AND MARGARET.

THE DAISY CHAIN;

OR,

ASPIRATIONS.

A Family Chronicle.

BY THE

AUTHOR OF "THE HEIR OF REDCLYFFE," "HEARTSEASE,
ETC.

'To the highest room,
Earth's lowliest flowers our Lord receives:
Close to His heart a place He gives,
Where they shall ever bloom.'

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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1871.

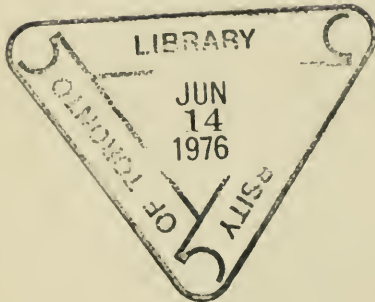
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P R E F A C E .

No one can be more sensible than is the Author that the present is an overgrown book of a nondescript class, neither the "tale" for the young, nor the novel for their elders, but a mixture of both.

Begun as a series of conversational sketches, the story outran both the original intention and the limits of the periodical in which it was commenced ; and, such as it has become, it is here presented to those who have already made acquaintance with the May family, and may be willing to see more of them. It would beg to be considered merely as what it calls itself, a Family Chronicle—a domestic record of home events, large and small, during those years of early life when the character is chiefly formed, and as an endeavour to trace the effects of those aspirations which are a part of every youthful nature. That the young should take one hint, to think whether their hopes and upward-breathings are truly upwards, and founded in lowliness, may be called the moral of the tale.

For those who may deem the story too long and the characters too numerous, the Author can only beg their pardon for any tedium that they may have undergone before giving it up.

FEB. 22ND, 1856

THE DAISY CHAIN.

CHAPTER I.

'Si douce est la Marguerite.'—CHAUCER.

'MISS WINTER, are you busy? Do you want this afternoon? Can you take a good long walk?'

'Ethel, my dear, how often have I told you of your impetuosity—you have forgotten.'

'Very well'—with an impatient twist—'I beg your pardon. Good morning, Miss Winter,' said a thin, lank, angular, sallow girl, just fifteen, trembling from head to foot with restrained eagerness, as she tried to curb her tone into the requisite civility.

'Good morning, Ethel, good morning, Flora,' said the prim, middle-aged, daily governess, taking off her bonnet, and arranging the stiff little rolls of curl at the long, narrow looking-glass, the border of which distorted the countenance.

'Good morning,' properly responded Flora, a pretty, fair girl, nearly two years older than her sister.

'Will you—' began to burst from Etheldred's lips again, but was stifled by Miss Winter's inquiry, 'Is your mamma pretty well to-day?'

'Oh! very well,' said both at once; 'she is coming to the reading.' And Flora added, 'Papa is going to drive her out to-day.'

'I am very glad. And the baby?'

'I do believe she does it on purpose!' whispered Ethel to herself, wriggling fearfully on the wide window-seat on which she had precipitated herself, and kicking at the bar of the table, by which manifestation she of course succeeded in deferring her hopes, by a reproof which caused her to draw herself into a rigid, melancholy attitude, a sort of penance of decorum, but a rapid motion of the eyelids, a tendency to crack the joints of the fingers, and an unquietness at the ends of her shoes, betraying the restlessness of the digits therein contained.

It was such a room as is often to be found in old country town houses, the two large windows looking out on a broad old-fashioned street, through heavy framework, and panes of glass scratched with

various names and initials. The walls were painted blue, the skirting almost a third of the height, and so wide at the top as to form a narrow shelf. The fire-place, constructed in the days when fires were made to give as little heat as possible, was ornamented with blue and white Dutch tiles bearing marvellous representations of Scripture history, and was protected by a very tall green guard; the chairs were much of the same date, solid and heavy, the seats in faded carpet-work, but there was a sprinkling of lesser ones and of stools; a piano; a globe; a large table in the middle of the room, with three desks on it; a small one, and a light cane chair by each window; and loaded book-cases. Flora began, 'If you don't want this afternoon to yourself—'

Ethel was on her feet, and open-mouthed. 'O, Miss Winter! if you would be so kind as to walk to Cocksnoor with us.'

'To Cocksnoor, my dear!' exclaimed the governess in dismay.

'Yes, yes, but hear,' cried Ethel. 'It is not for nothing. Yesterday—'

'No, the day before,' interposed Flora.

'There was a poor man brought into the hospital. He had been terribly hurt in the quarry, and papa says he'll die. He was in great distress, for his wife has just got twins, and there were lots of children before. They want everything—food and clothes—and we want to walk and take it.'

'We had a collection of clothes ready, luckily,' said Flora; 'and we have a blanket, and some tea and some arrowroot, and a bit of bacon, and mamma says she does not think it too far for us to walk, if you will be so kind as to go with us.'

Miss Winter looked perplexed. 'How could you carry the blanket, my dear?'

'O, we have settled that,' said Ethel, 'we mean to make the donkey a sumpter-mule, so, if you are tired, you may ride home on her.'

'But, my dear, has your mamma considered? They are such a set of wild people at Cocksnoor; I don't think we could walk there alone.'

'It is Saturday,' said Ethel, 'we can get the boys.'

'If you would reflect a little! They would be no protection. Harry would be getting into scrapes, and you and Mary running wild.'

'I wish Richard was at home!' said Flora.

'I know!' cried Ethel. 'Mr. Ernescliffe will come. I am sure he can walk so far now. I'll ask him.'

Ethel had clapped after her the heavy door with its shining brass lock, before Miss Winter well knew what she was about, and the governess seemed annoyed. 'Ethel does not consider,' said she. 'I don't think your mamma will be pleased.'

'Why not?' said Flora.

‘My dear—a gentleman walking with you, especially if Margaret is going.’

‘I don’t think he is strong enough,’ said Flora; ‘but I can’t think why there should be any harm. Papa took us all out walking with him yesterday—little Aubrey and all, and Mr. Ernescliffe went.’

‘But my dear—’

She was interrupted by the entrance of a fine tall blooming girl of eighteen, holding in her hand a pretty little maid of five. ‘Good morning, Miss Winter. I suppose Flora has told you the request we have to make to you?’

‘Yes, my dear Margaret, but did your mamma consider what a lawless place Cocksmoor is?’

‘That was the doubt,’ said Margaret, ‘but papa said he would answer for it nothing would happen to us, and mamma said if you would be so kind.’

‘It is unlucky,’ began the governess, but stopped at the incursion of some new comers, nearly tumbling over each other, Ethel at the head of them. ‘Oh! Harry!’ as the gathers of her frock gave way in the rude grasp of a twelve-years-old boy. ‘Miss Winter, ’tis all right—Mr. Ernescliffe says he is quite up to the walk, and will like it very much, and he will undertake to defend you from the quarrymen.’

‘Is Miss Winter afraid of the quarrymen?’ hallooed Harry. ‘Shall I take a club?’

‘I’ll take my gun and shoot them,’ valiantly exclaimed Tom; and while threats were passing among the boys, Margaret asked, in a low voice, ‘Did you ask him to come with us?’

‘Yes, he said he should like it of all things. Papa was there and said it was not too far for him—besides, there’s the donkey. Papa says it, so we must go, Miss Winter.’

Miss Winter glanced unutterable things at Margaret, and Ethel began to perceive she had done something wrong. Flora was going to speak, when Margaret, trying to appear unconscious of a certain deepening colour in her own cheeks, pressed a hand on her shoulder, and whispering, ‘I’ll see about it. Don’t say any more, please,’ glided out of the room.

‘What’s in the wind?’ said Harry. ‘Are many of your reefs out there, Ethel?’

‘Harry can talk nothing but sailor’s language,’ said Flora, ‘and I am sure he did not learn that of Mr. Ernescliffe. You never hear slang from him.’

‘But aren’t we going to Cocksmoor?’ asked Mary, a blunt downright girl of ten.

‘We shall know soon,’ said Ethel. ‘I suppose I had better wait till after the reading to mend that horrid frock?’

‘I think so, since we are so nearly collected,’ said Miss Win

ter; and Ethel, seating herself on the corner of the window-seat, with one leg doubled under her, took up a Shakespeare, holding it close to her eyes, and her brother Norman, who, in age, came between her and Flora, kneeling on one knee on the window-seat, and supporting himself with one arm against the shutter, leant over her, reading it too, disregarding a tumultuous skirmish going on in that division of the family collectively termed 'the boys,' namely, Harry, Mary, and Tom, until Tom was suddenly pushed down and tumbled over into Ethel's lap thereby upsetting her and Norman together, and there was a general downfall, and a loud scream, 'The sphynx!'

'You've crushed it,' cried Harry, dealing out thumps indiscriminately.

'No, here 'tis,' said Mary, rushing among them, and bringing out a green sphynx caterpillar, on her finger—'tis not hurt.'

'*Pax! Pax!*' cried Norman, over all, with the voice of an authority, as he leapt up lightly and set Tom on his legs again. 'Harry! you had better do that again,' he added, warningly. 'Be off, out of this window, and let Ethel and me read in peace.'

'Here's the place,' said Ethel—'Crispin, Crispian's day. How I do like Henry V.'

'It is no use to try to keep those boys in order!' sighed Miss Winter.

'Saturnalia, as papa calls Saturday,' replied Flora.

'Is not your eldest brother coming home to-day?' said Miss Winter, in a low voice to Flora, who shook her head, and said, confidentially, 'He is not coming till he has passed that examination. He thinks it better not.'

Here entered, with a baby in her arms, a lady with a beautiful countenance of calm sweetness, looking almost too young to be the mother of the tall Margaret, who followed her. There was a general hush as she greeted Miss Winter, the girls crowding round to look at their little sister, not quite six weeks old.

'Now, Margaret, will you take her up to the nursery?' said the mother, while the impatient speech was repeated, 'Mamma, can we go to Cocksnoor?'

'You don't think it will be too far for you?' said the mother to Miss Winter, as Margaret departed.

'O no, not at all, thank you, that was not— But Margaret has explained.'

'Yes, poor Margaret,' said Mrs. May, smiling. 'She has settled it by choosing to stay at home with me. It is no matter for the others, and he is going on Monday, so that it will not happen again.'

'Margaret has behaved very well,' said Miss Winter.

'She has indeed,' said her mother, smiling. 'Well, Harry how is the caterpillar?'

‘They’ve just capsized it, mamma,’ answered Harry, ‘and Mary is making all taut.’

Mrs. May laughed, and proceeded to advise Ethel and Norman to put away Henry V., and find the places in their Bibles, ‘or you will have the things mixed together in your heads,’ said she.

In the mean time Margaret, with the little babe, to-morrow to be her godchild, lying gently in her arms, came out into the matted hall, and began to mount the broad shallow-stepped stair-case, protected by low stout balusters, with a very thick flat and solid mahogany hand-rail polished by the boys’ constant riding up and down upon it. She was only on the first step, when the dining-room door opened, and there came out a young man, slight, and delicate-looking, with bright blue eyes, and thickly-curling light hair. ‘Acting nurse?’ he said smiling. ‘What an odd little face it is! I didn’t think little white babies were so pretty! Well, I shall always consider myself as the real godfather—the other is all a sham.’

‘I think so,’ said Margaret, ‘but I must not stand with her in a draught,’ and on she went, while he called after her. ‘So we are to have an expedition to-day.’

She did not gainsay it, but there was a little sigh of disappointment, and when she was out of hearing, she whispered, ‘Oh! lucky baby, to have so many years to come before you are plagued with troublesome propriety!’

Then depositing her little charge with the nurse, and trying to cheer up a solemn-looking boy of three, who evidently considered his deposition from babyhood as a great injury, she tripped lightly down again, to take part in the Saturday’s reading and catechising.

It was pleasant to see that large family in the hush and reverence of such teaching, the mother’s gentle power preventing the outbreaks of restlessness to which even at such times the wild young spirits were liable. Margaret and Miss Winter especially rejoiced in it on this occasion, the first since the birth of the baby, that she had been able to preside. Under her, though seemingly without her taking any trouble, there was none of the smothered laughing at the little ones’ mistakes, the fidgetting of the boys, or Harry’s audacious impertinence to Miss Winter; and no less glad was Harry to have his mother there, and be guarded from himself.

The Catechism was repeated, and a comment on the Sunday Services read aloud. The Gospel was that on the taking the lowest place, and when they had finished, Ethel said, ‘I like the verse which explains that:

“They who now sit lowest here,
When their Master shall appear,
He shall bid them higher rise,
And be highest in the skies.”

‘I did not think of that being the meaning of “when He that bade thee comesth,”’ said Norman, thoughtfully.

'It seemed to be only our worldly advantage that was meant before,' said Ethel.

'Well, it means that too,' said Flora.

'I suppose it does,' said Mrs. May; 'but the higher sense is the one chiefly to be dwelt on. It is a lesson how those least known and regarded here, and humblest in their own eyes, shall be the highest hereafter.'

And Margaret looked earnestly at her mother, but did not speak.

'May we go, mamma?' said Mary.

'Yes, you three—all of you, indeed, unless you wish to say any more.'

The 'boys' availed themselves of the permission. Norman hurried to put his books into a neat leather case, and Ethel stood thinking.

'It means altogether—it is a lesson against ambition,' said she.

'True,' said her mother, 'the love of eminence for its own sake.'

'And in so many different ways!' said Margaret.

'Aye, worldly greatness, riches, rank, beauty,' said Flora.

'All sorts of false flash and nonsense, and liking to be higher than one ought to be,' said Norman. 'I am sure there is nothing lower, or more mean and shabby, than getting places and praise a fellow does not deserve.'

'Oh! yes!' cried Ethel, 'but no one fit to speak to would do that!'

'Plenty of people do, I can tell you,' said Norman.

'Then I hope I shall never know who they are!' exclaimed Ethel. 'But I'll tell you what I was thinking of, mamma. Caring to be clever, and get on, only for the sake of beating people.'

'I think that might be better expressed.'

'I know,' said Ethel, bending her brow, with the fulness of her thought—'I mean caring to do a thing only because nobody else can do it—wanting to be first more than wanting to do one's best.'

'You are quite right, my dear Ethel,' said her mother; 'and I am glad you have found in the Gospel a practical lesson, that should be useful to you both. I had rather you did so than that you read it in Greek, though that is very nice too,' she added, smiling, as she put her hand on a little Greek Testament, in which Ethel had been reading, within her English Bible. 'Now, go and mend that deplorable frock, and if you don't dream over it, you won't waste too much of your holiday.'

'I'll get it done in no time!' cried Ethel rushing head-long up-stairs, twice tripping in it, before she reached the attic, where she slept, as well as Flora and Mary—a large room in the roof, the windows gay with bird-cages and flowers, a canary singing loud enough to deafen any one but girls to whom headaches were unknown, plenty of books and treasures, and a very fine view, from the dormer-window, of the town sloping downwards, and the river winding away, with some heathy hills in the distance. Poking and peering about with her short-sighted eyes, Ethel lighted on a work-

basket in rare disorder, pulled off her frock, threw on a shawl, and sat down cross-legged on her bed, stitching vigorously, while meantime she spouted with great emphasis an ode of Horace, which Norman having learnt, by heart, she had followed his example; it being her great desire to be even with him in all his studies, and though eleven months younger, she had never yet fallen behind him. On Saturday, he showed her what were his tasks for the week, and as soon as her rent was repaired, she swung herself downstairs in search of him for this purpose. She found him in the drawing-room, a pretty pleasant room—its only fault that it was rather too low. It had windows opening down to the lawn, and was full of pretty things, works and knickknacks. Ethel found the state of affairs unfavourable to her. Norman was intent on a book on the sofa, and at the table sat Mr. Ernescliffe, hard at work with calculations and mathematical instruments. Ethel would not, for the world, that any one should guess at her classical studies—she scarcely liked to believe that even her father knew of them, and to mention them before Mr. Ernescliffe would have been dreadful. So she only shoved Norman, and asked him to come.

‘Presently,’ he said.

‘What have you there?’ said she, poking her head into the book. ‘O! no wonder you can’t leave off. I’ve been wanting you to read it all the week.’

She read over him for a few minutes, then recoiled: ‘I forgot, mamma told me not to read those stories in the morning. Only five minutes, Norman.’

‘Wait a bit, I’ll come.’

She fidgetted, till Mr. Ernescliffe asked Norman if there was a table of logarithms in the house.

‘O yes,’ she answered; ‘don’t you know, Norman? In a brown book on the upper shelf in the dining-room. Don’t you remember papa’s telling us the meaning of them, when we had the grand book-dusting.’

He was conscious of nothing but his book; however, she found the logarithms, and brought them to Mr. Ernescliffe, staying to look at his drawing, and asking what he was making out. He replied, smiling at the impossibility of her understanding, but she wrinkled her brown forehead, hooked her long nose, and spent the next hour in amateur navigation.

Market Stoneborough was a fine old town. The Minster, grand with the architecture of the time of Henry III., stood beside a broad river, and round it were the buildings of a Convent, made by a certain good Bishop Whichcote, the nucleus of a grammar school, which had survived the Reformation, and trained up many good scholars; among them, one of England’s princely merchants, Nicholas Randall, whose effigy knelt in a niche in the Chancel wall, scarlet-cloaked, white-ruffed, and black-doubletted, a desk bearing an open

Bible before him, and a twisted pillar of Derbyshire spar on each side. He was the founder of thirteen almshouses, and had endowed two scholarships at Oxford, the object of ambition of the Stone borough boys, every eighteen months.

There were about sixty or seventy boarders, and the town boys slept at home, and spent their weekly holiday there on Saturday—the happiest day in the week to the May family, when alone, they had the company at dinner of Norman and Harry, otherwise known by their school names of June and July, given them because their elder brother had begun the series of months as May.

Some two hundred years back, a Doctor Thomas May had been head master, but ever since that time there had always been an M. D., not a D. D., in the family, owning a comfortable demesne of spacious garden, and field enough for two cows, still green and intact, among modern buildings and improvements.

The present Dr. May stood very high in his profession, and might soon have made a large fortune in London, had he not held fast to his home attachments. He was extremely skilful and clever, with a boyish character that seemed as if it could never grow older; ardent, sensitive, and heedless, with a quickness of sympathy and tenderness of heart that was increased rather than blunted, by exercise in scenes of suffering.

At the end of the previous summer holidays, Dr. May had been called one morning to attend a gentleman who had been taken very ill, at the Swan Inn.

He was received by a little boy of ten years old, in much grief, explaining that his brother had come two days ago from London, to bring him to school here; he had seemed unwell ever since they met, and last night had become much worse. And extremely ill the Doctor found him; a youth of two or three-and-twenty, suffering under a severe attack of fever, oppressed, and scarcely conscious, so as quite to justify his little brother's apprehensions. He advised the boy to write to his family, but was answered by a look that went to his heart—'Alan' was all he had in the world—father and mother were dead, and their relations lived in Scotland, and were hardly known to them.

'Where have you been living, then?'

'Alan sent me to school at Miss Lawler's, when my mother died, and there I have been ever since, while he has been these three years and a half on the African station.'

'What, is he in the navy?'

'Yes,' said the boy, proudly, 'Lieutenant Ernescliffe. He got his promotion last week. My father was in the battle of Trafalgar; and Alan has been three years in the West Indies, and then he was in the Mediterranean, and now on the coast of Africa, in the *Atantis*. You must have heard about him, for it was in the news

paper, how, when he was mate, he had the command of the Santa Isabel, the slaver they captured.'

The boy would have gone on for ever, if Dr. May had not recalled him to his brother's present condition, and proceeded to take every measure for the welfare and comfort of the forlorn pair.

He learnt from other sources that the Ernescliffes were well connected. The father had been a distinguished officer, but had been ill able to provide for his sons; indeed, he died, without ever having seen little Hector, who was born during his absence on a voyage—his last, and Alan's first. Alan, the elder by thirteen years, had been like a father to the little boy, showing judgment and self-denial that marked him of a high cast of character. He had distinguished himself in encounters with slave ships, and in command of a prize that he had had to conduct to Sierra Leone, he had shown great coolness and seamanship, in several perilous conjunctures, such as a sudden storm, and an encounter with another slaver, when his Portuguese prisoners became mutinous, and nothing but his steadiness and intrepidity had saved the lives of himself and his few English companions. He was, in fact, as Dr. May reported, pretty much of a hero. He had not, at the time, felt the effects of the climate, but, owing to sickness and death among the other officers, he had suffered much fatigue, and pressure of mind and body. Immediately on his return, had followed his examination, and though he had passed with great credit, and it had been at once followed by well-earned promotion, his nervous excitable frame had been overtaken, and the consequence was a long and severe illness.

The Swan inn was not forty yards from Dr. May's back gate, and, at every spare moment, he was doing the part of nurse as well as doctor, professionally obliged to Alan Ernescliffe for bringing him a curious exotic specimen of fever, and requiting him by the utmost care and attention, while, for their own sakes, he delighted in the two boys with all the enthusiasm of his warm heart. Before the first week was at an end, they had learned to look on the Doctor as one of the kindest friends it had been their lot to meet with, and Alan knew that if he died, he should leave his little brother in the hands of one who would comfort him as a father.

No sooner was young Ernescliffe able to sit up, than Dr. May insisted on conveying him to his own house, as his recovery was likely to be tedious, in solitude at the Swan. It was not till he had been drawn in a chair along the sloping garden, and placed on the sofa to rest, that he discovered that the time the good Doctor had chosen for bringing a helpless convalescent to his house, was two days after an eleventh child had been added to his family.

Mrs. May was too sorry for the solitary youth, and too sympathizing with her husband, to make any objection, though she was not fond of strangers, and had some anxieties. She had the ut

most dependence on Margaret's discretion, but there was a chance of awkward situations, which papa was not likely to see or guard against. However, all seemed to do very well, and no one ever came into her room without some degree of rapture about Mr Ernescliffe. The Doctor reiterated praises of his excellence, his principle, his ability and talent, his amusing talk; the girls were always bringing reports of his perfections; Norman retracted his grumblings at having his evenings spoilt; and 'the boys' were bursting with the secret that he was teaching them to rig a little ship that was to astonish mamma on her first coming down stairs and to be named after the baby; while Blanche did all the coquetry with him, from which Margaret abstained. The universal desire was for mamma to see him, and when the time came, she owned that papa's swan had not turned out a goose.

There were now no grounds for prolonging his stay; but it was very hard to go, and he was glad to avail himself of the excuse of remaining for the Christening, when he was to represent the absent godfather. After that, he must go; he had written to his Scottish cousins to offer a visit, and he had a promise that he should soon be afloat again. No place would ever seem to him so like home as Market Stoneborough. He was quite like one of themselves, and took a full share in the discussion on the baby's name, which, as all the old family appellations had been used up, was an open question. The Doctor protested against Alice and Edith, which he said were the universal names in the present day. The boys hissed every attempt of their sisters at a romantic name, and then Harry wanted it to be Atalantis! At last Dr. May announced that he should have her named Dowsabel if they did not agree, and Mrs. May advised all the parties concerned, to write their choice on a slip of paper, and little Aubrey should draw two out of her bag, trusting that Atalantis Dowsabel would not come out, as Harry confidently predicted.

However, it was even worse, Aubrey's two lots were Gertrude and Margaret. Ethel and Mary made a vehement uproar to discover who could have written Margaret, and at last traced it home to Mr. Ernescliffe, who replied that Flora, without saying why, had desired him to set down his favourite name. He was much disconcerted, and did not materially mend the matter by saying it was the first name that came into his head.

CHAPTER II.

'Meadows trim with daisies pied.'—MILTON.

ETHEL'S navigation lesson was interrupted by the dinner-bell. That long table was a goodly sight. Few ever looked happier than Dr. and Mrs. May, as they sat opposite to each other, presenting a considerable contrast in appearance as in disposition. She was a little woman, with that smooth pleasant plumpness that seems to belong to perfect content and serenity, her complexion fair and youthful, her face and figure very pretty, and full of quiet grace and refinement, and her whole air and expression denoting a serene, unruffled, affectionate happiness, yet with much authority in her mildness—warm and open in her own family, but reserved beyond it, and shrinking from general society.

The Doctor, on the contrary had a lank, bony figure, nearly six feet high, and looking more so from his slightness; a face sallow, thin, and strongly marked, an aquiline nose, highly developed forehead, and peculiar temples, over which the hair strayed in thin curling flakes. His eyes were light-coloured, and were seldom seen without his near-sighted spectacles, but the expressions of the mouth were everything—so varying, so bright, and so sweet were the smiles that showed beautiful white teeth—moreover, his hand was particularly well made, small and delicate; and it always turned out that no one ever recollected that Dr. May was plain, who had ever heard his kindly greeting.

The sons and daughters were divided in likeness to father and mother; Ethel was almost an exaggeration of the Doctor's peculiarities, especially at the formed, but unsoftened age of fifteen; Norman had his long nose, sallow complexion, and tall figure, but was much improved by his mother's fine blue eyes, and was a very pleasant-looking boy, though not handsome; little Tom was a thin, white, delicate edition of his father; and Blanche contrived to combine great likeness to him with a great deal of prettiness. Of those that, as nurse said, favoured their mamma, Margaret was tall and blooming, with the same calm eyes, but with the brilliance of her father's smile; Flora had greater regularity of feature, and was fast becoming a very pretty girl, while Mary and Harry could not boast of much beauty, but were stout sturdy pictures of health; Harry's locks in masses of small tight yellow curls, much given to tangling and matting, unfit to be seen all the week, till nurse put him to torture every Saturday, by combing them out so as, at least, to make him for once, like, she said, a gentleman, instead of a young lion.

Little Aubrey was said by his papa to be like nothing but the full moon. And there he shone on them, by his mamma's side, an-

nouncing in language few could understand, where he had been with papa.

'He has been a small doctor,' said his father, beginning to cut the boiled beef as fast as if his hands had been moved by machinery. 'He has been with me to see old Mrs. Robins, and she made so much of him, that if I take you again, you'll be regularly spoilt, young master.'

'Poor old woman, it must have been a pleasure to her,' said Mrs. May—'it is so seldom she has any change.'

'Who is she?' asked Mr. Ernescliffe.

'The butcher's old mother,' said Margaret, who was next to him. 'She is one of papa's pet patients, because he thinks her desolate and ill-used.'

'Her sons bully her,' said the doctor, too intent on carving to perceive certain deprecatory glances of caution cast at him by his wife, to remind him of the presence of man and maid—'and that smart daughter is worse still. She never comes to see the old lady but she throws her into an agitated state, fit to bring on another attack. A meek old soul, not fit to contend with them!'

'Why do they do it?' said Ethel.

'For the cause of all evil! That daughter marries a grazier, and wants to set up for gentility; she comes and squeezes presents out of her mother, and the whole family are distrusting each other, and squabbling over the spoil before the poor old creature is dead! It makes one sick! I gave that Mrs. Thorne a bit of my mind at last; I could not stand the sight any longer. Madam, said I, you'll have to answer for your mother's death, as sure as my name's Dick May—a harpy dressed up in feathers and lace.'

There was a great laugh, and an entreaty to know whether this was really his address—Ethel telling him she knew he had muttered it to himself quite audibly, for which she was rewarded by a pretended box on the ear. It certainly was vain to expect order at dinner on Saturday, for the Doctor was as bad as the boys, and Mrs. May took it with complete composure, hardly appearing sensible of the Babel which would sometimes almost deafen its promoter, papa; and yet her interference was all-powerful, as now when Harry and Mary were sparring over the salt, with one gentle 'Mary!' and one reproving glance, they were reduced to quiescence.

Meanwhile Dr. May, in a voice above the tumult, was telling 'Maggie,' as he always called his wife, some piece of news about Mr. Rivers, who had bought Abbotstoke Grange; and Alan Ernescliffe, in much lower tones, saying to Margaret how he delighted in the sight of these home scenes, and this free household mirth.

'It is the first time you have seen us in perfection,' said Margaret, 'with mamma at the head of the table—no, not quite perfection either, without Richard.'

'I am very glad to have seen it,' repeated Alan. 'What a blessing it must be to your brothers to have such a home!'

'Yes, indeed,' said Margaret, earnestly.

'I cannot fancy any advantage in life equal to it. Your father and mother so entirely one with you all.'

Margaret smiled, too much pleased to speak, and glanced at her mother's sweet face.

'You can't think how often I shall remember it, or how rejoiced I--' He broke off, for the noise subsided, and his speech was not intended for the public ear, so he dashed into the general conversation, and catching his own name, exclaimed, 'What's that base proposal, Ethel?'

'To put you on the donkey,' said Norman.

'They want to see a sailor riding,' interposed the doctor.

'Dr. May!' cried the indignant voice of Hector Ernescliffe, as his honest Scottish face flushed like a turkey cock, 'I assure you that Alan rides like—'

'Like a horse marine,' said Norman.

Hector and Harry both looked furious, but "June" was too great a man in their world, for them to attempt any revenge, and it was left for Mary to call out, 'Why, Norman, nonsense! Mr. Ernescliffe rode the new black kicking horse till he made it quite steady.'

'Made it steady! No, Mary, that is saying too much for it,' said Mr. Ernescliffe.

'It has no harm in it—capital horse—splendid,' said the Doctor; 'I shall take you out with it this afternoon, Maggie.'

'You have driven it several times?' said Alan.

'Yes, I drove him to Abbotstoke yesterday—never started, except at a fool of a woman with an umbrella, and at the train—and we'll take care not to meet that.'

'It is only to avoid the viaduct at half-past four,' said Mrs. May, 'and that is easily done.'

'So you are bound for Cocks Moor?' said the Doctor. 'I told the poor fellow you were going to see his wife, and he was so thankful, that it did one's heart good.'

'Is he better? I should like to tell his wife,' said Flora.

The Doctor screwed up his face. 'A bad business,' he said; 'he is a shade better to-day; he may get through yet; but he is not my patient. I only saw him because I happened to be there when he was brought in, and Ward was not in the way.'

'And what's his name?'

'I can't tell—don't think I ever heard.'

'We ought to know,' said Miss Winter; 'it would be awkward to go without.'

'To go roaming about Cocks Moor asking where the man in the hospital lives!' said Flora. 'We can't wait till Monday.'

'I've done,' said Norman; 'I'll run down to the hospital and find out. May I, mamma?'

'Without your pudding, old fellow?'

'I don't want pudding,' said Norman, slipping back his chair. 'May I, mamma?'

'To be sure you may;' and Norman, with a hand on the back of Ethel's chair, took a flying leap over his own, that set all the glasses ringing.

'Stop, stop! know what you are going after, sir,' cried his father. 'What will they know there of Cocks Moor, or the man whose wife has twins? You must ask for the accident in number five.'

'And oh! Norman, come back in time,' said Ethel.

'I'll be bound I'm back before Etheldred the Unready wants me,' he answered, bounding off with an elasticity that caused his mother to say the boy was made of Indian rubber, and then putting his head in by the window to say, 'By-the-by, if there's any pudding owing to me, that little chorister fellow of ours, Bill Blake, has got a lot of voracious brothers that want anything that's going. Tom and Blanche might take it down to 'em; I'm off! Hooray!' and he scampered headlong up the garden, prolonging his voice into a tremendous shout as he got further off, leaving every one laughing, and his mother tenderly observing that he was going to run a quarter of a mile and back, and lose his only chance of pudding for the week—old Bishop Whicheote's rules contemplating no fare but daily mutton, to be bought at a shilling per sheep. A little private discussion ensued between Harry and Hector, on the merits of the cakes at Ballhatchet's gate, and old Nelly's pies, which led the doctor to mourn over the loss of the tarts of the cranberries, that used to grow on Cocks Moor, before it was inhabited, and to be the delight of the scholars of Stoneborough, when he was one of them—and then to enchant the boys by relations of ancient exploits, especially his friend Spencer climbing up, and engraving a name on the top of the market cross, now no more, swept away by the Town Council in a fit of improvement, which had for the last twenty years enraged the Doctor at every remembrance of it. Perhaps at this moment his wife could hardly sympathize, when she thought of her boys emulating such deeds.

'Papa,' said Ethel, 'will you lend me a pair of spectacles for the walk?'

'And make yourself one, Ethel,' said Flora.

'I don't care—I want to see the view.'

'It is very bad for you, Ethel,' further added her mother; 'you will make your sight much shorter if you accustom your eyes to them.'

'Well, mamma, I never do wear them about the house.'

'For a very good reason,' said Margaret; 'because you haven't got them.'

'No, I believe Harry stole them in the holidays.'

'Stole them!' said the Doctor; 'as if they weren't my property, unjustifiably appropriated by her!'

'They were that pair that you never could keep on, papa,' said Ethel—'no use at all to you. Come, do lend me some.'

'I'm sure I shan't let you wear them,' said Harry. 'I shan't go, if you choose to make yourself such an object.'

'Ah!' said the father, 'the boys thought it time to put a stop to it when it came to a caricature of the little Doctor in petticoats.'

'Yes, in Norman's Lexicon,' said Ethel, 'a capital likeness of you, papa; but I never could get him to tell me who drew it.'

Nor did Ethel know that that caricature had been the cause of the black eye that Harry had brought home last summer. Harry returned, to protest that he would not join the walk, if she chose to be seen in the spectacles, while she undauntedly continued her petition though answered that she would attract the attacks of the quarry-men who would take her for an attenuated owl.

'I wish you were obliged to go about without them yourself, papa!' cried Ethel, 'and then you would know how tiresome it is not to see twice the length of your own nose.'

'Not such a very short allowance either,' said the Doctor, quaintly, and therewith the dinner concluded. There was apt to be a race between the two eldest girls, for the honour of bringing down the baby; but this time their father strode up three steps at once, turned at the top of the first flight, made his bow to them, and presently came down with his little daughter in his arms, nodded triumphantly at the sisters, and set her down on her mother's lap.

'There, Maggie, you are complete, you old hen-and-chicken daisy. Can't you take her portrait in the character, Margaret?'

'With her pink cap, and Blanche and Aubrey as they are now, on each side?' said Flora.

'Margaret ought to be in the picture herself,' said Ethel. 'Fetch the artist in Norman's Lexicon, Harry.'

'Since he has hit off one of us so well,' said the doctor. 'Well! I'm off. I must see old Southern. You'll be ready by three? Good-bye, hen and chicken.'

'And I may have the spectacles?' said Ethel, running after him; 'you know I am an injured individual, for mamma won't let me carry baby about the house, because I am so blind.'

'You are welcome to embellish yourself, as far as I am concerned.'

A general dispersion ensued, and only Mrs. May, Margaret, and the baby, remained.

'O no!' sighed Margaret; 'you can't be the hen-and-chicken daisy properly, without all your chickens. It is the first christening we ever had without our all being there.'

'It was best not to press it, my dear,' said her mother. 'Your papa would have had his thoughts turned to the disappointment

again, and it makes Richard himself so unhappy to see his vexation that I believe it is better not to renew it.'

'But to miss him for so long!' said Margaret. 'Perhaps it is best, for it is very miserable, when papa is sarcastic and sharp, and he cannot understand it, and takes it as meaning so much more than it really does, and grows all the more frightened and diffident I cannot think what he would do without you to encourage him.'

'Or you, you good sister,' said her mother, smiling. 'If we could only teach him not to mind being laughed at, and to have some confidence in himself, he and papa would get on together.'

'It is very hard,' cried Margaret, almost indignantly, 'that papa won't believe it, when he does his best!'

'I don't think papa can bear to bring himself to believe that it is his best.'

'He is too clever himself to see how other people can be slow,' said Margaret; 'and yet'—the tears came into her eyes—'I cannot bear to think of his telling Richard it was no use to think of being a Clergyman, and he had better turn carpenter at once, just because he had failed in his examination.'

'My dear, I wish you would forget that,' said Mrs. May. 'You know papa sometimes says more than he means, and he was excessively vexed and disappointed. I know he was pleased with Ritchie's resolve not to come home again till he had passed, and it is best that it should not be broken.'

'The whole vacation, studying so hard, and this Christening!' said Margaret; 'it is treating him as if he had done wrong. I do believe Mr. Ernescliffe thinks he has—for papa always turns away the conversation, if his name is mentioned! I wish you would explain it, mamma; I can't bear *that*.'

'If I can,' said Mrs. May, rather pleased that Margaret had not taken on herself this vindication of her favourite brother at her father's expense. 'But after all, Margaret, I never feel quite sure that poor Ritchie does exert himself to the utmost; he is too depending to make the most of himself.'

'And the more vexed papa is, the worse it grows!' said Margaret. 'It is provoking, though. How I do wish sometimes to give Ritchie a jog, when there is some stumbling-block that he sticks fast at. Don't you remember those sums, and those declensions? When he is so clear and sensible about practical matters too—anything but learning—I cannot think why—and it is very mortifying!'

'I dare say it is very good for us not to have our ambition gratified,' said her mother. 'There are so many troubles worse than these failures, that it only shows how happy we are that we should take them so much to heart.'

'They are a very real trouble!' said Margaret. 'Don't smile, mamma. Only remember how wretched his school days were,

when papa could not see any difficulty in what to him was so hard, and how all papa's eagerness only stupified him the more.'

'They are a comfort not to have that over again. Yet,' said the mother, 'I often think there is more fear for Norman. I dread his talent and success being snares.'

'There is no self-sufficiency about him,' said Margaret.

'I hope not, and he is so transparent, that it would be laughed down at the first bud; but the universal good report, and certainty of success, and being so often put in comparison with Richard, is hardly safe. I was very glad he heard what Ethel said to-day.'

'Ethel spoke very deeply,' said Margaret; 'I was a good deal struck by it—she often comes out with such solid thoughts.'

'She is an excellent companion for Norman.'

'The desire of being first!' said Margaret, 'I suppose that is a form of caring for oneself! It set me thinking a good deal, mamma, how many forms of ambition there are. The craving for rank, or wealth, or beauty, are so clearly wrong, that one does not question about them; but I suppose, as Ethel said, the caring to be first in attainments is as bad.'

'Or in affection,' said Mrs. May.

'In affection—oh! mamma, there is always some one person with whom one is first,' said Margaret, eagerly; and then, her colour deepening, as she saw her mother looking at her, she said hastily, 'Ritchie—I never considered it—but I know—it is my great pleasure—oh, mamma!'

'Well, my dear, I do not say but that you are the first with Richard, and that you well deserve to be so; but is the seeking to be the first even in that way safe? Is it not self-seeking again?'

'Well, perhaps it is. I know it is what makes jealousy.'

'The only plan is not to think about ourselves at all,' said Mrs. May. 'Affection is round us like sunshine, and there is no use in measuring and comparing. We must give it out freely ourselves, hoping for nothing again.'

'O, mamma, you don't mean that!'

'Perhaps I should have said, bargaining for nothing again. It will come of itself, if we don't exact it; but rivalry is the sure means of driving it away, because that is trying to get oneself worshipped.'

'I suppose, then, you have never thought of it,' said Margaret, smiling.

'Why, it would have been rather absurd,' said Mrs. May, laughing, 'to begin to torment myself, whether you were all fond of me! you all have just as much affection for me, from beginning to end, as is natural, and what's the use of thinking about it? No, no, Margaret, don't go and protest that you love me, more than is natural,' as Margaret looked inclined to say something very eager, that would be in the style of Regan and Goneril. It will be

natural by-and-by that you should, some of you, love some one else better and if I cared for being first, what should I do then?’

‘O, mamma!—But,’ said Margaret, suddenly, ‘you are always sure of papa.’

‘In one way, yes,’ said Mrs. May; ‘but how do I know how long—’ Calm as she was, she could not finish that sentence. ‘No, Margaret, depend upon it, the only security is, not to think about ourselves at all, and not to fix our mind on any affection on earth. The least share of the Love above, is the fulness of all blessing, and if we seek that first, all these things will be added unto us, and are,’ she whispered more to herself than to Margaret.

CHAPTER III.

‘Wee modest crimson-tipped flower,
Thou’st met me in an evil hour,
For I maun crush among the stoure
Thy slender stem.
To spare thee now is past my power,
Thou bonnie gem.’—BURNS.

‘Is this all the walking party?’ exclaimed Mr. Ernescliffe, as Miss Winter, Flora, and Norman gathered in the hall.

‘Harry won’t go because of Ethel’s spectacles,’ answered Flora; ‘and Mary and he are inseparable, so they are gone with Hector to have a shipwreck in the field.’

‘And your other sisters?’

‘Margaret has ratted—she is going to drive out with mamma,’ said Norman; ‘as to Etheldred the Unready, I’ll run up and hurry her.’

‘In a moment he was at her door. ‘Oh! Norman, come in Is it time?’

‘I should think so! You’re keeping every one waiting.’

‘Oh dear! go on; only just tell me the past participle of *offerō*, and I’ll catch you up.’

‘*Oblatus.*’

‘O, yes, how stupid. The *a* long or short? Then that’s right. I had such a line in my head. I was forced to write it down. Is not it a capital subject this time?’

‘The devotion of Decius? Capital. Let me see?’ said Norman, taking up a paper scribbled in pencil, with Latin verses. ‘O you have taken up quite a different line from mine. I began with Mount Vesuvius spouting lava like anything.’

‘But Mount Vesuvius didn’t *spout* till it overthrew Pompeii.’

‘Murder!’ cried Norman, ‘I forgot! It’s lucky you put me in mind. I must make a fresh beginning. There go my six best lines! However, it was an uncanny place, fit for hobgoblins, and

shades, and funny customers, which will do as well for my purpose. Ha! that's grand about its being so much better than the *vana gloria triumphalis*—only take care of the scanning there—'

'If it was but English. Something like this:—

For what is equal to the fame
Of forgetting self in the aim.

That's not right, but—'

'Ethel, Norman, what are you about?' cried Flora, 'Do you mean to go to Cocks Moor to-day?'

'Oh yes!' cried Ethel, flying into vehement activity; 'only I've lost my blue-edged handkerchief—Flora, have you seen it?'

'No; but here is your red scarf.'

'Thank you, there is a good Flora. And oh! I finished a frock all but two stitches. Where is it gone? Go on, all of you, I'll overtake you—

Purer than breath of earthly frame,
Is losing self in a glorious aim.

Is that better, Norman?'

'You'll drive us out of patience,' said Flora, tying the handkerchief round Ethel's throat, and pulling out the fingers of her gloves, which of course were inside out; 'are you ready?'

'Oh, my frock! my frock! There 'tis—three stitches—go on, and I'll come,' said Ethel, seizing a needle, and sewing vehemently at a little pink frock. 'Go on, Miss Winter goes slowly up the hill, and I'll overtake you.'

'Come, Norman, then; it is the only way to make her come at all.'

'I shall wait for her,' said Norman. 'Go on, Flora, we shall catch you up in no time;' and, as Flora went, he continued, 'Never mind your aims and fames and trumpery English rhymes. Your verses will be much the best, Ethel; I only went on a little about Mount Vesuvius and the landscape, as Alan described it the other day, and Decius taking a last look, knowing he was to die. I made him beg his horse's pardon, and say how they will both be remembered, and their self-devotion would inspire Romans to all posterity, and shout with a noble voice!' said Norman, repeating some of his lines, correcting them as he proceeded.

'Oh! yes; but oh! dear, I've done. Come along,' said Ethel, crumpling her work into a bundle, and snatching up her gloves—then, as they ran down stairs, and emerged into the street, 'it is a famous subject.'

'Yes, you have made a capital beginning. If you won't break down somewhere, as you always do, with some frightful false quantity, that you would get an imposition for, if you were a boy. I wish you were. I should like to see old Hoxton's face if you were to show him up some of these verses.'

'I'll tell you what, Norman, if I was you, I would not make Decius flatter himself with the fame he was to get—it is too like the stuff every one talks in stupid books. I want him to say—Rome—my country—the eagles—must win, if they do—never mind what becomes of me.'

'But why should he not like to get the credit of it, as he did? Fame and glory—they are the spirit of life, the reward of such a death.'

'O no, no,' said Ethel. 'Fame is coarse and vulgar—blinder than ever they draw Love or Fortune—she is only a personified newspaper, trumpeting out all that is extraordinary, without minding whether it is good or bad. She misses the delicate and lovely—I wished they would give us a theme to write about her. I should like to abuse her well.'

'It would make a very good theme, in a new line,' said Norman; 'but I don't give into it, altogether. It is the hope and the thought of fame, that has made men great, from first to last. It is in every one that is not good for nothing, and always will be! The moving spirit of man's greatness!'

'I'm not sure,' said Ethel; 'I think looking for fame is like wanting a reward at once. I had rather people forgot themselves. Do you think Arnold von Winkelried thought about fame, when he threw himself on the spears?'

'He got it,' said Norman.

'Yes; he got it for the good of other people, not to please himself. Fame does those that admire it good, not those that win it.'

'But!' said Norman, and both were silent for some short interval, as they left the last buildings of the town, and began to mount a steep hill. Presently Norman slackened his pace, and driving his stick vehemently against a stone, exclaimed, 'It is no use talking, Ethel, it is all a fight and a race. One is always to try to be foremost. That's the spirit of the thing—that's what the great, from first to last, have struggled, and fought, and lived, and died for.'

'I know it is a battle, I know it is a race. The Bible says so,' replied Ethel; 'but is not there the difference, that here all may win—not only one? One may do one's best, not care whether one is first or last. That's what our reading to-day said.'

'That was against trumpery vanity—false elevation—not what one has earned for oneself, but getting into other people's places that one never deserved. That every one despises!'

'Of course! That they do. I say, Norman, didn't you mean Harvey Anderson?'

Instead of answering, Norman exclaimed, 'It is pretension that is hateful—true excelling is what one's life is for. No, no, I'll never be beat, Ethel—I never have been beat by any one, except by you, when you take pains,' he added, looking exultingly at his sister, 'and I never will be.'

‘O Norman!’

‘I mean, of course, while I have senses. I would not be like Richard for all the world.’

‘O no, no, poor Richard!’

‘He is an excellent fellow in everything else,’ said Norman; ‘I could sometimes wish I was more like him—but how he can be so amazingly slow, I can’t imagine. That examination paper he broke down in—I could have done it as easily as possible.’

‘I did it all but one question,’ said Ethel, ‘but so did he, you know, and we can’t tell whether we should have it done well enough.’

‘I know I must do something respectable when first I go to Oxford, if I don’t wish to be known as the man whose brother was plucked,’ said Norman.

‘Yes,’ said Ethel; ‘if papa will but let you try for the Randall scholarship next year, but he says it is not good to go to Oxford so young.’

‘And I believe I had better not be there with Richard,’ added Norman. ‘I don’t like coming into contrast with him, and I don’t think he can like it, poor fellow, and it isn’t his fault. I had rather stay another year here, get one of the open scholarships, and leave the Stoneborough ones for those who can do no better.’

In justice to Norman, we must observe that this was by no means said as a boast. He would scarcely have thus spoken to any one but Etheldred, to whom, as well as to himself, it seemed mere matter-of-fact. The others had in the mean time halted at the top of the hill, and were looking back at the town—the great old Minster, raising its twin towers and long roof, close to the river, where rich green meadows spread over the valley, and the town rising irregularly on the slope above, plentifully interspersed with trees and gardens, and one green space on the banks of the river, speckled over with a flock of little black dots in rapid motion.

‘Here you are!’ exclaimed Flora. ‘I told them it was of no use to wait when you and Norman had begun a dissertation.’

‘Now, Mr. Ernescliffe, I should like you to say,’ cried Ethel, ‘which do you think is the best, the name of it, or the thing?’ Her eloquence always broke down with any auditor but her brother or, perhaps, Margaret.

‘Ethel!’ said Norman, ‘how is any one to understand you? The argument is this: Ethel wants people to do great deeds, and be utterly careless of the fame of them; I say, that love of glory is a mighty spring.’

‘A mighty one,’ said Alan; ‘but I think, as far as I understand the question, that Ethel has the best of it.’

‘I don’t mean that people should not serve the cause first of all,’ said Norman, ‘but let them have their right place and due honour.’

‘They had better make up their minds to do without it,’ said Alan. ‘Remember

“The world knows nothing of its greatest men.”

Then it is a great shame,’ said Norman.

‘But do you think it right,’ said Ethel, ‘to care for distinction? It is a great thing to earn it, but I don’t think one should care for the outer glory.’

‘I believe it is a great temptation,’ said Alan. ‘The being over elated or over depressed by success or failure in the eyes of the world, independently of the exertion we have used—’

‘You call it a temptation?’ said Ethel

‘Decidedly so.’

‘But one can’t live or get on without it,’ said Norman.

There they were cut short. There was a plantation to be crossed, with a gate that would not open, and that seemed an effectual barrier against both Miss Winter and the donkey, until by persuasive eloquence and great gallantry, Mr. Ernescliffe performed the wonderful feat of getting the former over the tall fence while Norman conducted the donkey a long way round, undertaking to meet them at the other side of the plantation.

The talk became desultory, as they proceeded for at least a mile along a cart-track, through soft tufted grass and heath, and young fir trees. It ended in a broad open moor, stony and full of damp boggy hollows, forlorn and desolate under the autumn sky. Here they met Norman again, and walked on along a very rough and dirty road, the ground growing more decidedly into hills and valleys as they advanced, till they found themselves before a small, but very steep hillock, one side of which was cut away into a slate quarry. Round this stood a colony of roughly-built huts, of mud, turf, or large blocks of the slate. Many workmen were engaged in splitting up the slates, or loading waggons with them, rude, wild-looking men, at the sight of whom the ladies shrank up to their protectors, but who seemed too busy even to spare time for staring at them.

They were directed to John Taylor’s house, a low mud cottage, very wretched looking, and apparently so smoky, that Mr. Ernescliffe and Norman were glad to remain outside and survey the quarry, while the ladies entered.

Inside they found more cleanliness and neatness than they had expected, but there was a sad appearance of poverty, insufficient furniture, and the cups and broken tea-pot on the table, holding nothing but toast and water, as a substitute for their proper contents. The poor woman was sitting by the fire with one twin on her lap, and the other on a chair by her side, and a larger child was in the corner by the fire, looking heavy and ill, while others of different ages lounged about listlessly. She was not untidy, but

very pale, and she spoke in a meek, subdued way, as if the ills of life were so heavy on her that she had no spirit even to complain. She thanked them for their gifts but languidly, and did not visibly brighten when told that her husband was better.

Flora asked when the babes would be christened.

‘I can’t hardly tell, Miss—’tis so far to go.’

‘I suppose none of the children can go to school. I don’t know their faces there,’ said Flora, looking at a nice, tall, smooth haired girl, of thirteen or fourteen.

‘No, Miss—’tis so far. I am sorry they should not, for they always was used to it where we lived before, and my oldest girl, she can work very nicely. I wish I could get a little place for her.’

‘You would hardly know what to do without her,’ said Miss Winter.

‘No, ma’am; but she wants better food than I can give her, and it is a bad wild place for a girl to grow up. It is not like what I was used to, ma’am; I was always used to keep to my school and to my Church—but it is a bad place to live in here.’

No one could deny it, and the party left the cottage gravely. Alan and Norman joined them, having heard a grievous history of the lawlessness of the people, from a foreman with whom they had met. There seemed to be no visible means of improvement. The parish Church was Stoneborough, and there the living was very poor, the tithes having been appropriated to the old Monastery, and since its dissolution having fallen into possession of a Body that never did anything for the town. The incumbent, Mr. Ramsden, had small means, and was not a high stamp of Clergyman, seldom exerting himself, and leaving most of his parish work to the two undermasters of the school, Mr. Wilmot and Mr. Harrison, who did all they had time and strength for, and more too, within the town itself. There was no hope for Cocksmoor!

‘There would be a worthy ambition!’ said Etheldred, as they turned their steps homeward. ‘Let us propose that aim to ourselves, to build a Church on Cocksmoor!’

‘How many years do you give us to do it in?’ said Norman.

‘Few or many, I don’t care. I’ll never leave off thinking about it till it is done.’

‘It need not be long,’ said Flora, ‘if one could get up a subscription.’

‘A penny subscription?’ said Norman. ‘I’d rather have it my own doing.’

‘You agree then,’ said Ethel, ‘do you, Mr. Ernescliffe?’

‘I may safely do so,’ he answered, smiling.

Miss Winter looked at Etheldred reprovingly, and she shrank into herself, drew apart, and indulged in a reverie. She had heard in books, of girls writing poetry, romance, history—gaining fifties

and hundreds. Could not some of the myriads of fancies floating in her mind thus be made available? She would compose, publish, earn money—some day call papa, show him her hoard, beg him to take it, and, never owning whence it came, raise the building. Spire and chancel—pinnacle and buttress rose before her eyes—and she and Norman were standing in the porch, with an orderly, religious population, blessing the unknown benefactor, who had caused the news of salvation to be heard among them.

They were almost at home, when the sight of a crowd in the main street checked them. Norman and Mr. Ernescliffe went forward to discover the cause, and spoke to some one on the outskirts—then Mr. Ernescliffe hurried back to the ladies. ‘There’s been an accident,’ he said, hastily—‘you had better go down the lane and m by the garden.’

He was gone in an instant, and they obeyed in silence. Whence came Ethel’s certainty that the accident concerned themselves? In an agony of apprehension, though without one outward sign of it, she walked home. They were in the garden—all was apparently as usual, but no one was in sight. Ethel had been first, but she held back, and let Miss Winter go forward into the house. The front door was open—servants were standing about in confusion, and one of the maids, looking dreadfully frightened, gave a cry, ‘Oh! Miss—Miss—have you heard?’

‘No—what? What has happened? Not Mrs. May—’ exclaimed Miss Winter.

‘Oh! ma’am! it is all of them. The carriage is overturned, and—’

‘Who’s hurt? Mamma! papa! Oh! tell me!’ cried Flora.

‘There’s the nurse,’ and Ethel flew up to her. ‘What is it? Oh! nurse!’

‘My poor, poor children,’ said old nurse, passionately kissing Ethel. Harry and Mary were on the stairs behind her, clinging together.

A stranger looked into the house, followed by Adams, the stableman. ‘They are going to bring Miss May in,’ some one said.

Ethel could bear it no longer. As if she could escape, she fled upstairs, into her room, and, falling on her knees, hid her face on her bed.

There were heavy steps in the house, then a sound of hasty feet coming up to her. Norman dashed into the room, and threw himself on a chair. He was ghastly pale, and shuddered all over.

‘Oh! Norman, Norman, speak. What is it?’

He groaned, but could not speak; he rested his head against her, and gasped. She was terribly frightened. ‘I’ll call—’ and she would have gone, but he held her. ‘No,—no—they can’t!’ He was prevented from saying more, by chattering teeth and deadly faintness. She tried to support him, but could only guide him as he sank, till he lay at full length on the floor, where she put a pillow under his

head, and gave him some water. 'Is it—oh! tell me. Are they much hurt? Oh, try to say.'

'They say Margaret is alive,' said Norman, in gasps; 'but—And papa—he stood up—sat—walked—was better—'

'Is he hurt—much hurt?'

'His arm—' and the tremor and fainting stopped him again.

'Mamma?' whispered Ethel; but Norman only pressed his face into the pillow.

She was so bewildered as to be more alive to the present distress of his condition, than to the vague horrors down-stairs. Some minutes passed in silence, Norman lying still, excepting a nervous trembling that agitated his whole frame. Again was heard the strange tread, doors opening and shutting, and suppressed voices, and he turned his face upwards, and listened with his hand pressed to his forehead, as if to keep himself still enough to listen.

'Oh! what is the matter? What is it?' cried Ethel, startled and recalled to the sense of what was passing. 'Oh! Norman!' then springing up, with a sudden thought, 'Mr. Ward! Oh! is he there?'

'Yes,' said Norman, in a low hopeless tone, 'he was at the place. He said it—'

'What?'

Again Norman's face was out of sight.

'Mamma?' Ethel's understanding perceived, but her mind refused to grasp the extent of the calamity. There was no answer, save a convulsive squeezing of her hand.

Fresh sounds below recalled her to speech and action. 'Where is she? What are they doing for her? What—'

'There's nothing to be done. She—when they lifted her up, she was—'

'Dead?'

'Dead.'

The boy lay with his face hidden, the girl sat by him on the floor, too much crushed for even the sensations belonging to grief, neither moving nor looking. After an interval Norman spoke again, 'The carriage turned right over—her head struck on the kerb stone—'

'Did you see?' said Ethel, presently.

'I saw them lift her up.' He spoke at intervals, as he could get breath, and bear to utter the words. 'And papa—he was stunned—but soon he sat up, said he would go to her—he looked at her—felt her pulse, and then—sank down over her!'

'And did you say, I can't remember—was he hurt?'

The shuddering came again, 'His arm—all twisted—broken,' and his voice sank into a faint whisper; Ethel was obliged to sprinkle him again with water. 'But he won't die?' said she, in a tone calm from its bewilderment.

'Oh! no, no, no—'

'And Margaret?'

'They were bringing her home. I'll go and see. Oh! what's the meaning of this?' exclaimed he, scolding himself, as sitting up, he was forced to rest his head on his shaking hand.

'You are still faint, dear Norman; you had better lie still, and I'll go and see.'

'Faint—stuff—how horridly stupid!' but he was obliged to lay his head down again; and Ethel, scarcely less trembling, crept carefully towards the stairs, but a dread of what she might meet came over her, and she turned towards the nursery.

The younger ones sat there in a frightened huddle. Mary was on a low chair by the infant's cot, Blanche in her lap, Tom and Harry leaning against her, and Aubrey almost asleep. Mary held up her finger as Ethel entered, and whispered, 'Hush! don't wake baby for anything!'

The first true pang of grief shot through Ethel like a dart, stabbing and taking away her breath. 'Where are they?' she said; 'how is papa? who is with him?'

'Mr. Ward and Alan Ernescliffe,' said Harry. 'Nurse came up just now, and said they were setting his arm.'

'Where is he?'

'On the bed in his dressing-room,' said Harry.

'Has he come to himself—is he better?'

They did not seem to know, and Ethel asked where to find Flora. 'With Margaret she was told, and she was thinking whether she could venture to seek her, when she herself came fast up the stairs. Ethel and Harry both darted out. 'Don't stop me,' said Flora—'they want some handkerchiefs.'

'What, is not she in her own room?'

'No,' said Harry, 'in mamma's; and then his face quivered all over, and he turned away. Ethel ran after her sister, and pulling out drawers without knowing what she sought, begged to hear how papa and Margaret were.

'We can't judge of Margaret—she has moved, and made a little moaning—there are no limbs broken, but we are afraid for her head. Oh! if papa could but—'

'And papa?'

'Mr. Ward is with him now—his arm is terribly hurt.'

'But oh! Flora—one moment—is he sensible?'

'Hardly; he does not take any notice—but don't keep me.'

'Can I do anything?' following her to the head of the stairs.

'No; I don't see what you can do. Miss Winter and I are with Margaret, there's nothing to do for her.'

It was a relief. Etheldred shrank from what she might have to behold, and Flora hastened down, too busy and too useful to have time to think. Harry had gone back to his refuge in the nursery, and Ethel returned to Norman. There they remained for

a long time, both unwilling to speak or stir, or even to observe to each other on the noises that came into them, as their door was left ajar, though in those sounds they were so absorbed, that they did not notice the cold of a frosty October evening, or the darkness that closed in on them.

They heard the poor babe crying, one of the children going down to call nurse, and nurse coming up; then Harry, at the door of the room where the boys slept, calling Norman in a low voice. Norman, now nearly recovered, went and brought him into his sister's room, and his tidings were, that their father's arm had been broken in two places, and the elbow frightfully injured, having been crushed and twisted by the wheel. He was also a good deal bruised, and though Mr. Ward trusted there was no positive harm to the head, he was in an unconscious state, from which the severe pain of the operation had only roused him, so far as to evince a few signs of suffering. Margaret was still insensible.

The piteous sound of the baby's wailing almost broke their hearts. Norman walked about the room in the dark, and said he should go down, he could not bear it; but he could not make up his mind to go, and after about a quarter of an hour, to their great relief, it ceased.

Next Mary opened the door, saying, 'Norman, here's Mr. Wilmot come to ask if he can do anything—Miss Winter sent word that you had better go to him.'

'How is baby?' asked Harry.

'Nurse has fed her, and is putting her to bed; she is quiet now,' said Mary; 'will you go down, Norman?'

'Where is he?'

'In the drawing-room.'

Norman paused to ask what he was to say. 'Nothing,' said Mary, 'nobody can do anything. Make haste. Don't you want a candle?'

'No, thank you, I had rather be in the dark. Come up as soon as you have seen him,' said Etheldred.

Norman went slowly down, with failing knees, hardly able to conquer the shudder that came over him, as he passed those rooms. There were voices in the drawing-room, and he found a sort of council there, Alan Ernescliffe, the surgeon, and Mr. Wilmot. They turned as he came in, and Mr. Wilmot held out his hand with a look of affection and kindness that went to his heart, making room for him on the sofa, while going on with what he was saying. 'Then you think it would be better for me not to sit up with him.'

'I should decidedly say so,' replied Mr. Ward. 'He has recognised Mr. Ernescliffe, and any change might excite him, and lead him to ask questions. The moment of his full consciousness is especially to be dreaded.'

'But you do not call him insensible?'

‘No, but he seems stunned—stupified by the shock, and by pain. He spoke to Miss Flora when she brought him some tea.’

‘And admirably she managed,’ said Alan Ernescliffe. ‘I was much afraid of some answer that would rouse him, but she kept her self-possession beautifully, and seemed to compose him in a moment.’

‘She is valuable indeed—so much judgment and activity,’ said Mr. Ward. ‘I don’t know what we should have done without her. But we ought to have Mr. Richard—has no one sent to him?’

Alan Ernescliffe and Norman looked at each other.

‘Is he at Oxford, or at his tutor’s?’ asked Mr. Wilmot.

‘At Oxford; he was to be there to-day, was he not, Norman?’

‘What o’clock is it? Is the post gone—seven—no; it is all safe,’ said Mr. Ward.

Poor Norman! he knew he was the one who ought to write, but his icy trembling hand seemed to shake more helplessly than ever, and a piteous glance fell upon Mr. Wilmot.

‘The best plan would be,’ said Mr. Wilmot, ‘for me to go to him at once, and bring him home. If I go by the mail-train, I shall get to him sooner than a letter could.’

‘And it will be better for him,’ said Mr. Ward. ‘He will feel it dreadfully, poor boy. But we shall all do better when we have him. You can get back to-morrow evening.’

‘Sunday,’ said Mr. Wilmot, ‘I believe there is a train at four.’

‘Oh! thank you, sir,’ said Norman.

‘Since that is settled, perhaps I had better go up to the Doctor,’ said Alan; ‘I don’t like leaving Flora alone with him,’ and he was gone.

‘How fortunate that that youth is here,’ said Mr. Wilmot—‘he seems to be quite taking Richard’s place.’

‘And to feel it as much,’ said Mr. Ward. ‘He has been invaluable with his sailor’s resources and handiness.’

‘Well, what shall I tell poor Richard?’ asked Mr. Wilmot.

‘Tell him there is no reason his father should not do very well, if we can keep him from agitation—but there’s the point. He is of so excitable a constitution, that his faculties being so far confused, is the best thing, perhaps, that could be. Mr. Ernescliffe manages him very well—used to illness on that African coast, and the Doctor is very fond of him. As to Miss May, one can’t tell what to say about her yet—there’s no fracture, at least—it must be a work of time to judge.’

Flora at that moment half-opened the door, and called Mr. Ward, stopping for a moment to say it was for nothing of any consequence. Mr. Wilmot and Norman were left together. Norman put his hands over his face and groaned—his master looked at him with kind anxiety, but did not feel as if it were yet time to speak of consolation.

'God bless and support you, and turn this to your good, my dear boy,' said he affectionately, as he pressed his hand, 'I hope to bring your brother to-morrow.'

'Thank you, sir,' was all Norman could say; and as Mr. Wilmot went out by the front door, he slowly went up again, and lingering on the landing-place, was met by Mr. Ward, who told him to his relief—for the mere thinking of it renewed the faint sensation—that he had better not go to his father's room.

There was nothing to be done but to return to Ethel and Harry and tell them all; with some humiliation at being helpless, where Flora was doing so much, and to leave their father to be watched by a stranger. If he had been wanted, Norman might have made the effort, but being told that he would be worse than useless, there was nothing for him but to give way.

They sat together in Ethel's room, till somewhere between eight and nine o'clock, when good old nurse, having put her younger ones to bed, came in search of them. 'Dear, dear! poor darlings,' said she, as she found them sitting in the dark; she felt their cold hands, and made them all come into the nursery, where Mary was already, and, fondling them, one by one, as they passively obeyed her, she set them down on their little old stools round the fire, took away the high fender, and gave them each a cup of tea. Harry and Mary ate enough to satisfy her, from a weary craving feeling, and for want of employment; Norman sat with his elbow on his knee, and a very aching head resting on his hand, glad of drink, but unable to eat; Ethel could be persuaded to do neither, till she found old nurse would let her have no peace.

The nurse sent them all to bed, taking the two girls to their own room, undressing them, and never leaving them until Mary was in a fair way of crying herself to sleep—for saying her prayers had brought the tears; while Ethel lay so wide awake that it was of no use to wait for her, and then she went to the boys, tucked them each in, as when they were little children, and saying, 'Bless your dear hearts!' bestowed on each of them a kiss which came gratefully to Norman's burning brow, and which even Harry's boyish manliness could not resist.

Flora was in Margaret's room, too useful to be spared.
So ended that dreadful Saturday.

CHAPTER IV.

'They may not mar the deep repose
Of that immortal flower:
Though only broken hearts are found
To watch her cradle by,
No blight is on her slumbers found,
No touch of harmful eye.'

LYRA INNOCENTIUM.

SUCH a strange sad Sunday! No going to Church, but all the poor children moving in awe and oppression about the house, speaking under their breath, as they gathered in the drawing-room. Into the study they might not go, and when Blanche would have asked why, Tom pressed her hand and shuddered.

Etheldred was allowed to come and look at Margaret, and even to sit in the room for a little while, to take the place of Miss Winter; but she was not sensible of sufficient usefulness to relieve the burden of fear and bewilderment in the presence of that still, pale form; and, what was almost worse, the sight of the familiar objects, the chair by the fire, the sofa, the books, the work-basket, the letter-case, the dressing things, all these were too oppressive. She sat crouched up, with her face hidden in her hands, and the instant she was released, hastened back to Norman. She was to tell him that he might go into the room, but he did not move, and Mary alone went in and out with messages.

Dr. May was not to be visited, for he was in the same half-conscious state, apparently sensible only of bodily suffering, though he answered when addressed, and no one was trusted to speak to him but Flora and Alan Ernescliffe.

The rest wore through the day as best they might. Harry slept a good deal, Ethel read to herself, and tried to get Norman to look at passages which she liked, Mary kept the little ones from being troublesome, and at last took them to peep behind the school-room blinds for Richard's coming.

There was a simultaneous shout when, at four o'clock, they caught sight of him, and though, at Ethel's exclamation of wonder, Mary and Tom hung their heads at having forgotten themselves, the association of gladness in seeing Richard was refreshing; the sense of being desolate and forsaken was relieved, and they knew that now they had one to rely on and to comfort them.

Harry hastened to open the front door, and Richard, with his small trim figure, and fresh, fair young face, flushed, though not otherwise agitated, was among them, almost devoured by the younger ones, and dealing out quiet caresses to them, as he caught from the words and looks of the others, that at least his father and sister were no worse. Mr. Wilmot had come with him, but only staid to hear the tidings.

‘Can I see papa?’ were Richard’s first audible words—all the rest had been almost dumb show.

Ethel thought not, but took him to Margaret’s room, where he stood for many minutes without speaking; then whispered to Flora that he must go to the others, she should call him if—and went down, followed by Ethel.

Tom and Blanche had fallen into teasing tricks, a sort of melancholy play to relieve the tedium. They grew cross. Norman was roused to reprove sharply, and Blanche was beginning to cry. But Richard’s entrance set all at peace—he sat down among them, and, with soft voice and arm round Blanche, as she leaned against him, made her good in a moment; and she listened while he talked over with Norman and Ethel all they could bear to speak of.

Late in the day, Flora came into her father’s room, and stood gazing at him, as he lay with eyes closed, breathing heavily, and his brows contracted by pain. She watched him with piteous looks, as if imploring him to return to his children. Poor girl, to-day’s quiet, after the last evening’s bustle, was hard to bear. She had then been distracted from thought by the necessity of exertion, but it now repayed itself, and she knew not how to submit to do nothing but wait and watch.

‘No change?’ enquired Alan Ernescliffe; looking kindly in her face.

‘No,’ replied she in a low, mournful tone. ‘She only once said thank you.’

A voice which she did not expect, asked inquiringly, ‘Margaret?’ and her heart beat as if it would take away her breath, as she saw her father’s eyes intently fixed on her. ‘Did you speak of her?’ he repeated.

‘Yes, dear papa,’ said Flora, not losing presence of mind, though in extreme fear of what the next question might be. ‘She is quiet and comfortable, so don’t be uneasy, pray.’

‘Let me hear,’ he said, and his whole voice and air showed him to be entirely roused. ‘There is injury? What is it—’

He continued his inquiries till Flora was obliged fully to explain her sister’s condition, and then he dismayed her by saying he would get up and go to see her. Much distressed, she begged him not to think of it, and appealed to Alan, who added his entreaties that he would at least wait for Mr. Ward; but the Doctor would not relinquish his purpose, and sent her to give notice that he was coming.

Mr. Ernescliffe followed her out of the room, and tried to console her, as she looked at him in despair.

‘You see he is quite himself, quite collected,’ he said; ‘you heard how clear and coherent his questions were.’

‘Can’t it be helped? Do try to stop him till I can send to Mr Ward.’

‘I will try, but I think he is in a state to judge for himself. I

do, upon my word; and I believe trying to prevent him would be more likely to do him harm than letting him satisfy himself. I really think you need not be alarmed.'

'But you know,' said Flora, coming nearer, and almost gasping as she whispered and signed toward the door, 'she is there—it is mamma's room, that will tell all.'

'I believe he knows,' said Alan. 'It was *that* which made him faint after the accident, for he had his perceptions fully at first. I have suspected all day that he was more himself than he seemed, but I think he could not bear to awaken his mind to understand it, and that he was afraid to hear about her—your sister, so that our mention of her was a great relief, and did him good. I am convinced he knows the rest. Only go on, be calm, as you have been, and we shall do very well.'

Flora went to prepare. Ethel eagerly undertook to send to Mr. Ward, and hastened from the room, as if in a sort of terror, shrinking perhaps from what might lead to an outburst of grief. She longed to *have* seen her father, but was frightened at the chance of meeting him. When she had sent her message, and told her brothers what was passing, she went and lingered on the stairs and in the passage for tidings. After what seemed a long time, Flora came out, and hastened to the nursery, giving her intelligence on the way.

'Better than could be hoped, he walked alone into the room, and was quite calm and composed. Oh! if this will not hurt him, if the seeing baby was but over!'

'Does he want her?'

'Yes, he would have come up here himself, but I would not let him—Nurse, do you hear? Papa wants baby, let me have her.'

'Bless me, Miss Flora, you can't hold her while you are all of a tremble! And he has been to Miss Margaret?'

'Yes, nurse, and he was only rather stiff and lame.'

'Did Margaret seem to know him?' said Ethel.

'She just answered in that dreamy way when he spoke to her. He says he thinks it is as Mr. Ward believes, and that she will soon come to herself. He is quite able to consider—'

'And he knows all?'

'I am sure he does. He desired to see baby, and he wants you, nurse. Only mind you command yourself—don't say a word you can help—do nothing to agitate him.'

Nurse promised, but the tears came so fast, and sobs with them, as he approached her master's room, that Flora saw no composure could be expected from her; and taking the infant from her, carried it in, leaving the door open for her to follow when wanted. Ethel stood by listening. There was silence at first, then some sounds from the baby, and her father's voice soothing it, in his wonted caressing phrases and tones, so familiar that they seemed to break the spell, drive away her vague terrors, and restore her father. Her heart wounded, and a sudden impulse carried her to the bedside, at

once forgetting all dread of seeing him, and chance of doing him harm. He lay, holding the babe close to him, and his face was not altered, so that there was nothing in the sight to impress her with the need of caution, and, to the consternation of the anxious Flora, she exclaimed, abruptly and vehemently, 'Papa! should not she be Christened?'

Dr. May looked up at Ethel, then at the infant; 'Yes,' he said, 'at once.' Then added feebly and languidly, 'Some one must see to it.'

There was a pause, while Flora looked reproachfully at her sister, and Ethel became conscious of her imprudence, but in a few moments Dr. May spoke again, first to the baby, and then asking, 'Is Richard here?'

'Yes, papa.'

'Send him up presently. Where's nurse?'

Ethel retreated, much alarmed at her rash measure, and when she related it, she saw that Richard and Mr. Ernestine both thought it had been a great hazard.

'Papa wants you,' was a welcome sound to the ears of Richard, and brought a pink glow into his face. He was never one who readily showed his feelings, and there was no danger of his failing in self-command, though grievously downcast, not only at the loss of the tender mother, who had always stood between him and his father's impatience, but by the dread that he was too dull and insignificant to afford any help or comfort in his father's dire affliction.

Yet there was something in the gentle sad look that met him, and in the low tone of the 'How d'ye do, Ritchie?' that drove off all thought of not being loved; and when Dr. May further added, 'You'll see about it all—I am glad you are come,' he knew he was of use, and was encouraged and cheered. That his father had full confidence and reliance in him, and that his presence was a satisfaction and relief, he could no longer doubt; and this was a drop of balm beyond all his hopes; for loving and admiring his father intensely, and with depressed spirits and a low estimate of himself, he had begun to fancy himself incapable of being anything but a vexation and burthen.

He sat with his father nearly all the evening, and was to remain with him at night. The rest were comforted by the assurance that Dr. May was still calm, and did not seem to have been injured by what had passed. Indeed, it seemed as if the violence and suddenness of the shock, together with his state of suffering, had deadened his sensations; for there was far less agitation about him than could have been thought possible in a man of such strong, warm affections and sensitive temperament.

Ethel and Norman went up arm-in-arm at bed-time.

'I am going to ask if I may wish papa good night,' said Ethel 'Shall I say anything about your coming?'

Norman hesitated, but his cheeks blanched; he shuddered, shook

his head without speaking, ran up after Harry, and waved her back when she would have followed.

Richard told her that she might come in, and, as she slowly advanced, she thought she had never seen anything so ineffably mournful as the affectionate look on her father's face. She held his hand and ventured—for it was with difficulty she spoke—to hope he was not in pain.

'Better than it was, thank you, my dear,' he said, in a soft weak tone; then, as she bent down to kiss his brow, 'You must take care of the little ones.'

'Yes, papa,' she could hardly answer, and a large drop gathered slowly in each eye, long in coming, as if the heart ached too much for them to flow freely.

'Are they all well?'

'Yes, papa.'

'And good?'

'Yes, very good all day.'

A long deep sigh. Ethel's two tears stood on her cheeks.

'My love to them all. I hope I shall see them to-morrow. God bless you, my dear, good night.'

Ethel went up-stairs, saddened and yet soothed. The calm silent sorrow, too deep for outward tokens, was so unlike her father's usually demonstrative habits, as to impress her all the more, yet those two tears were followed by no more; there was much strangeness and confusion in her mind in the newness of grief.

She found poor Flora, spent with exertion under the reaction of all she had undergone, lying on her bed, sobbing as if her heart would break, calling in gasps of irrepressible agony on mamma! mamma! yet with her face pressed down on the pillow that she might not be heard. Ethel, terrified and distressed, timidly implored her to be comforted, but it seemed as if she were not even heard; she would have fetched some one, but whom? Alas! alas! it brought back the sense that no mother would ever soothe them—Margaret, papa, both so ill, nurse engaged with Margaret! Ethel stood helpless and despairing, and Flora sobbed on, so that Mary awakened to burst out in a loud frightened fit of crying; but in a few moments a step was heard at the door, a knock, and Richard asked, 'Is anything the matter?'

He was in the room in a moment, caressing and saying affectionate things with gentleness and fondling care, like his mother, and which recalled the days when he had been proud to be left for a little while the small nurse and guardian of the lesser ones. Mary was hushed in a moment, and Flora's exhausted weeping was gradually soothed, when she was able to recollect that she was keeping him from her father; with kind good nights, he left Ethel to read to her till she could sleep. Long did Ethel read, after both her sisters were slumbering soundly; she went on in a sort of dreamy grief, almost devoid

of pain, as if all this was too terrible to be true; and she had imagined herself into a story, which would give place at dawn to her ordinary life.

At last she went to bed, and slept till wakened by the return of Flora, who had crept down in her dressing-gown to see how matters were going. Margaret was in the same state, papa was asleep, after a restless distressing night, with much pain and some fever; and whenever Richard had begun to hope from his tranquillity, that he was falling asleep, he was undeceived by hearing an almost unconsciously uttered sigh of 'Maggie, my Maggie!' and then the head turned wearily on the pillow, as if worn out with the misery from which there was no escape. Towards morning, the pain had lessened, and, as he slept, he seemed much less feverish than they could have ventured to expect.

Norman looked wan and wretched, and could taste no breakfast, indeed Harry reported that he had been starting and talking in his sleep half the night, and had proceeded to groaning and crying out till, when it could be borne no longer, Harry waked him, and finished his night's rest in peace.

The children were kept in the drawing room that morning, and there were strange steps in the house; but only Richard and Mr. Ernescliffe knew the reason. Happily there had been witnesses enough of the overturn to spare any reference to Dr. May—the violent start of the horses had been seen, and Adams and Mr. Ernescliffe agreed, under their breath, that the new black one was not fit to drive, while the whole town was so used to Dr. May's headlong driving, that every one was recollecting their own predictions of accidents. There needed little to account for the disaster—the only wonder was, that it had not happened sooner.

'I say,' announced Harry, soon after they were released again, 'I've been in to papa. His door was open, and he heard me, and called me. He says he should like any of us to come in and see him. Hadn't you better go, Norman?'

Norman started up, and walked hastily out of the room, but his hand shook so, that he could hardly open the door; and Ethel, seeing how it was with him, followed him quickly, as he dashed, at full speed, up the stairs. At the top, however, he was forced to cling to the rail, gasping for breath, while the moisture started on his forehead.

'Dear Norman,' she said, 'there's nothing to mind. He looks just as usual. You would not know there was anything the matter.' But he rested his head on his hand, and looked as if he could not stir. 'I see it won't do,' said Ethel—'don't try—you will be better by-and-by, and he has not asked for you in particular.'

'I won't be beat by such stuff,' said Norman, stepping hastily forwards, and opening the door suddenly. He got through the greeting pretty well, there was no need for him to speak, he only gave his hand and looked away, unable to bring himself to turn his eyes on his

father, and afraid of letting his own face be seen. Almost at the same moment, nurse came to say something about Margaret, and he seized the opportunity of withdrawing his hand, and hurrying away, in good time, for he was pale as death, and was obliged to sit down on the head of the stairs, and lean his head against Etheldred.

'What does make me so ridiculous?' he exclaimed faintly, but very indignantly.

The first cure was the being forced to clear out of Mr. Ward's way, which he could not effect without being seen; and Ethel, though she knew that he would be annoyed, was not sorry to be obliged to remain, and tell what was the matter with him. 'Oh,' said Mr. Ward, turning and proceeding to the dining-room, 'I'll set that to rights in a minute, if you will ask for a tumbler of hot-water, Miss Ethel.'

And armed with the cordial he had prepared, Ethel hunted up her brother, and persuaded him, after scolding her a little, to swallow it, and take a turn in the garden; after which he made a more successful attempt at visiting his father.

There was another room whither both Norman and Etheldred wished to go, though they dared not hint at their desire. At last, Richard came to them, as they were wandering in the garden, and, with his usual stillness of manner, shaded with additional seriousness, said, 'Would you like to come into the study?'

Etheldred put one hand into his, Norman took the other, and soon they stood in that calm presence. Fair, cold, white, and intensely still—that face brought home to them the full certainty that the warm brightening look would never beam on them, the soft blue eyes never guide, check, and watch them, the smile never approve or welcome them. To see her unconscious of their presence was too strange and sad, and all were silent, till, as they left the room, Ethel looked out at Blanche and Aubrey in the garden. 'They will never remember her! Oh! why should it be?'

Richard would fain have moralized and comforted, but she felt as if she knew it all before, and heard with languid attention. She had rather read than talk, and he sat down to write letters.

There were no near relations to be sent for. Dr. May was an only son, and his wife's sister, Mrs. Arnott, was in New Zealand; her brother had long been dead, and his widow, who lived in Edinburgh, was scarcely known to the May family. Of friends there were many, fast bound by affection and gratitude, and notes, inquiries, condolences, and offers of service came in thickly, and gave much occupation to Flora, Richard, and Alan Ernescliffe, in turn. No one from without could do anything for them—they had all the help they wanted in Miss Winter and in Alan, who was invaluable in sharing with Richard the care of the Doctor, as well as in giving him the benefit of his few additional years' experience, and relieving him of some of his tasks. He was indeed like one of themselves, and a most valu-

able help and comforter. Mr. Wilmot gave them all the time he could, and on this day saw the Doctor, who seemed to find some solace in his visit, though saying very little.

On this day the baby was to be baptized. The usual Stoneborough fashion was to collect all the Christenings for the month into one Sunday, except those for such persons as thought themselves too refined to see their children Christened before the congregation, and who preferred an empty Church and a week-day. The little one had waited till she was nearly six weeks old for 'a Christening Sunday,' and since that had been missed, she could not be kept unbaptized for another month; so, late in the day, she was carried to Church.

Richard had extremely gratified old nurse, by asking her to represent poor Margaret, Mrs. Hoxton stood for the other godmother, and Alan Ernescliffe was desired to consider himself absolutely her sponsor, not merely a proxy. The younger children alone were to go with them: it was too far off, and the way lay too much through the town for it to be thought proper for the others to go. Ethel wished it very much, and thought it nonsense to care whether people looked at her; and in spite of Miss Winter's seeming shocked at her proposing it, had a great mind to persist. She would even have appealed to her papa, if Flora had not stopped her, exclaiming, 'Really, Ethel, I think there never was a person so entirely without consideration as you are.'

Much abashed, Ethel humbly promised that if she might go into papa's room, she would not say one word about the Christening, unless he should begin, and, to her great satisfaction, he presently asked her to read the service to him. Flora came to the door-way of Margaret's room, and listened; when she had finished, all were silent.

'How shall we, how can we virtuously bring up our motherless little sister?' was the thought with each of the girls. The answers were, in one mind, 'I trust we shall do well by her, dear little thing. I see, on an emergency, that I know how to act. I never thought I was capable of being of so much use, thanks to dear, dear mamma's training. I shall manage, I am sure, and so they will all depend on me, and look up to me. How nice it was to hear dear papa say what he did about the comfort of my being able to look after Margaret.'

In the other, 'Poor darling, it is saddest of all for her, because she knows nothing, and will never remember her mamma! But if Margaret is but better, she will take care of her, and oh! how we ought to try—and I, such a naughty wild thing—if I should hurt the dear little ones by carelessness, or by my bad example! Oh! what shall I do, for want of some one to keep me in order? If I should vex papa by any of my wrong ways!'

They heard the return of the others, and the sisters both sprang up, 'May we bring her to you?' said Flora.

'Yes, do, my dears.'

The sisters all came down together with the little one, and Flora put her down within the arm her father stretched out for her. He gazed into the baby face, which, in its expressionless placidity, almost recalled her mother's tranquil sweetness.

'Gertrude Margaret,' said Flora, and with a look that had more of tenderness than grief, he murmured, 'My Daisy blossom, my little Maggie.'

'Might we?' said Ethel, when Flora took her again, 'might we take her to her godmother to see if she would notice her?'

He looked as if he wished it; but said, 'No, I think not, better not rouse her,' and sighed heavily; then, as they stood round his bed, unwilling to go, he added, 'Girls, we must learn carefulness and thoughtfulness. We have no one to take thought for us now.'

Flora pressed the babe in her arms, Ethel's two reluctant tears stood on her cheeks, Mary exclaimed, 'I'll try not to be naughty;' and Blanche climbed up to kiss him, saying, 'I will be always good, papa.'

'Daisy—papa's Daisy—your vows are made,' whispered Ethel, gaining sole possession of the babe for a minute. 'You have promised to be good and holy. We have the keeping of you, mamma's precious flower, her pearl of truth! Oh, may God guard you to be an unstained jewel, till you come back to her again—and a blooming flower, till you are gathered into the wreath that never fades—my own sweet poor little motherless Daisy!'

CHAPTER V.

'Through lawless camp, through ocean wild,
Her prophet eye pursues her child;
Seans mournfully her poet's strain,
Fears for her merchant, loss alike and gain.'

LYRA INNOCENTIUM.

DR. MAY took the management of himself into his own hands, and paid so little attention to Mr. Ward's recommendations, that his sons and daughters were in continual dread of his choosing to do something that might cause injurious agitation.

However, he did not attempt to go farther than Margaret's bed side, where he sat hour after hour, his eyes fixed upon her, as she continued in a state bordering on insensibility. He took little notice of anything else, and hardly spoke. There were heavy sighs now and then, but Richard and Flora, one or other of whom was always watching him, could hardly tell whether to ascribe them to the oppression of sorrow, or of suffering. Their great fear was of his insisting on seeing his wife's face, and it was a great relief that he never alluded to her, except once, to desire Richard to bring him her

ring. Richard silently obeyed, and without a word, he placed it on his little finger. Richard used to read the Psalms to him in the morning before he was up, and Flora would bring little Daisy and lay her by his side.

To the last moment, they dreaded his choosing to attend the funeral, and Flora had decided on remaining at home, though trembling at the thought of what there might be to go through. They tried to let him hear nothing about it, but he seemed to know every thing; and when Flora came into Margaret's room, without her bonnet, he raised his head, and said, 'I thought you were all going.'

'The others are—but may I not stay with you and her, papa?'
 'I had rather be alone, my dear. I will take care of her. I should wish you all to be there.'

They decided that his wishes ought to be followed, and that the patients must be entrusted to old nurse. Richard told Flora, who looked very pale, that she would be glad of it afterwards, and she had his arm to lean upon.

The grave was in the cloister attached to the Minster, a smooth green square of turf, marked here and there with small flat lozenges of stone, bearing the date and initials of those who lay there, and many of them recording former generations of Mays, to whom their descent from the head-master had given a right of burial there. Dr. Hoxton, Mr. Wilmot, and the surgeon, were the only friends whom Richard had asked to be with them, but the Minster was nearly full, for there was a very strong attachment and respect for Dr. and Mrs. May throughout the neighbourhood, and every one's feelings were strongly excited.

'In the midst of life, we are in death—' There was a universal sound, as of a sort of sob, that Etheldred never disconnected from those words. Yet hardly one tear was shed by the young things who stood as close as they could round the grave. Harry and Mary did indeed lock their hands together tightly, and the shoulders of the former shook as he stood, bowing down his head, but the others were still and quiet, in part from awe and bewilderment, but partly, too, from a sense that it was against her whole nature that there should be clamorous mourning for her. The calm still day seemed to tell them the same, the sun beaming softly on the grey arches and fresh grass, the sky clear and blue, and the trees that shewed over the walls bright with autumn colouring, all suitable to the serenity of a life unclouded to its last moment. Some of them felt as if it were better to be there, than in their saddened desolate home.

But home they must go, and, before going up stairs, as Flora and Etheldred stood a moment or two with Norman, Ethel said in a tone of resolution, and of some cheerfulness, 'Well, we have to begin afresh.'

‘Yes,’ said Flora, ‘it is a great responsibility. I do trust we may be enabled to do as we ought.’

‘And now Margaret is getting better, she will be our stay,’ said Ethel.

‘I must go to her,’ and Flora went up stairs.

‘I wish I could be as useful as Flora,’ said Ethel, ‘but I mean to try, and if I can but keep out of mischief, it will be something.’

‘There is an object for all one does, in trying to be a comfort to papa.’

‘That’s no use,’ said Norman, listlessly. ‘We never can.’

‘O but, Norman, he won’t be always as he is now—I am sure he cares for us enough to be pleased, if we do right and get on.’

‘We used to be so happy!’ said Norman.

Ethel hesitated a little, and presently answered, ‘I don’t think it can be right to lament for our own sakes so much, is it?’

‘I don’t want to do so,’ said Norman, in the same dejected way.

‘I suppose we ought not to feel it either.’ Norman only shook his head. ‘We ought to think of her gain. You can’t? Well, I am glad, for no more can I. I can’t think of her liking for papa and baby and all of us to be left to ourselves. But that’s not right of me, and of course it all comes right where she is; so I always put that out of my head, and think what is to come next in doing, and pleasing papa, and learning.’

‘That’s grown horrid,’ said Norman. ‘There’s no pleasure in getting on, nor in anything.’

‘Don’t you care for papa and all of us being glad, Norman?’

As Norman could not just then say that he did, he would not answer.

‘I wish—’ said Ethel, disappointed, but cheering up the next minute. ‘I do believe it is having nothing to do. You will be better when you get back to school on Monday.’

‘That is worst of all!’

‘You don’t like going among the boys again? But that must be done some time or other. Or shall I get Richard to speak to Dr. Hoxton to let you have another week’s leave?’

‘No, no, don’t be foolish. It can’t be helped.’

‘I am very sorry, but I think you will be better for it.’

She almost began to fancy herself unfeeling, when she found him so much more depressed than she was herself, and unable to feel it a relief to know that the time of rest, and want of occupation was over. She thought it light-minded, though she could not help it, to look forward to the daily studies where she might lose her sad thoughts, and be as if everything were as usual. But suppose she should be to blame, where would now be the gentle discipline? Poor Ethel’s feelings were not such as to deserve the imputation of levity, when this thought came over her; but her buoyant mind, always

seeking for consolation, recurred to Margaret's improvement, and she fixed her hopes on her.

Margaret was more alive to surrounding objects, and, when roused, she knew them all, answered clearly when addressed, had even, more than once, spoken of her own accord, and shewn solicitude at the sight of her father's bandaged, helpless arm, but he soon soothed this away. He was more than ever watchful over her, and could scarcely be persuaded to leave her for one moment, in his anxiety to beat hand to answer, when first she should speak of her mother, a moment apprehended by all the rest, almost as much for his sake as for hers.

So clear had her perceptions been, and so much more awake did she appear, on this evening, that he expected the enquiry to come every moment, and lingered in her room; till she asked the hour, and begged him to go to bed.

As he bent over her, she looked up in his face, and said, softly, 'Dear papa.'

There was that in her tone which showed she perceived the truth, and he knelt by her side kissing her, but not daring to relax his restraint of feeling.

'Dear papa,' she said again, 'I hope I shall soon be better, and be some comfort to you.'

'My best—my own—my comfort,' he murmured, all he could say without giving way.

'Baby—is she well?'

'Yes, thank Heaven, she has not suffered at all.'

'I heard her this morning, I must see her to-morrow. But don't stay, dear, dear papa, it is late, and I am sure you are not at all well. Your arm—is it very much hurt?'

'It is nothing you need think about, my dear. I am much better than I could have imagined possible.'

'And you have been nursing me all the time! Papa, you must let me take care of you now. Do pray go to bed at once, and get up late. Nurse will take good care of me. Good night, dear papa.'

When Dr. May had left her, and tried to tell Richard how it had been, the tears cut him short, and had their free course; but there was much of thankfulness, for it might be looked on as the restoration of his daughter; the worst was over, and the next day he was able to think of other things, had more attention to spare for the rest, and when the surgeon came, took some professional interest in the condition of his own arm, inquired after his patients, and even talked of visiting them.

In the meantime, Margaret sent for her eldest brother, begging him to tell her the whole, and it was heard as calmly and firmly as it was told. Her bodily state lulled her mind; and besides it was not new; she had observed much while her faculties were still too much benumbed for her to understand all, or to express her feelings.

Her thoughts seemed chiefly occupied with her father. She made Richard explain to her the injury he had suffered, and begged to know whether his constant attendance on her, could do him harm. She was much rejoiced when her brother assured her that nothing could be better for him, and she began to say with a smile, that very likely her being hurt had been fortunate. She asked who had taken care of him before Richard's arrival, and was pleased to hear that it was Mr. Ernescliffe. A visit from the little Gertrude Margaret was happily accomplished, and, on the whole, the day was most satisfactory, she herself declaring that she could not see that there was anything the matter with her, except that she felt lazy, and did not seem able to move.

Thus the next Sunday morning dawned with more cheerfulness. Dr. May came down stairs for the first time, in order to go to Church with his whole flock, except the two Margarets. He looked very wan and shattered, but they clustered gladly around him, when he once more stood among them, little Blanche securing his hand, and nodding triumphantly to Mr. Ernescliffe, as much as to say, 'Now I have him, I don't want you.'

Norman alone was missing; but he was in his place at Church among the boys. Again in returning, he slipped out of the party and was at home the first, and when this recurred in the afternoon, Ethel began to understand his motive. The High-street led past the spot where the accident had taken place, though neither she nor any of the others knew exactly where it was, except Norman, on whose mind the scene was branded indelibly; she guessed that it was to avoid it that he went along what was called Randall's Alley, his usual short cut to school.

That Sunday brought back to the children that there was no one to hear their hymns; but Richard was a great comfort, watching over the little ones more like a sister than a brother. Ethel was ashamed of herself when she saw him taking thought for them, tying Blanche's bonnet, putting Aubrey's gloves on, teaching them to put away their Sunday toys, as if he meant them to be as neat and precise as himself.

Dr. May did not encounter the family dinner, nor attempt a second going to Church; but Blanche was very glorious, as she led him down to drink tea, and, before going up again, he had a conversation with Alan Ernescliffe, who felt himself obliged to leave Stoneborough early on the morrow.

'I can endure better to go now,' said he, 'and I shall hear of you often; Hector will let me know, and Richard has promised to write.'

'Aye, you must let us often have a line. I should guess you were a letter writing man.'

'I have hitherto had too few friends who cared to hear of me to

write much, but the pleasure of knowing that any interest is taken in me here—'

'Well,' said the Doctor, 'mind that a letter will always be welcome, and when you are coming southwards, here are your old quarters. We cannot lose sight of you any way, especially—' and his voice quivered, 'after the help you gave my poor boys and girls in their distress.'

'It would be the utmost satisfaction to think I had been of the smallest use,' said Alan, hiding much under these common-place words.

'More than I know,' said Dr. May; 'too much to speak of—Well, we shall see you again, though it is a changed place, and you must come and see your god-daughter—poor child—may she only be brought up as her sisters were! They will do their best, poor things, and so must I, but it is sad work!'

Both were too much overcome for words, but the Doctor was the first to continue, as he took off his dimmed spectacles. He seemed to wish to excuse himself for giving way; saying, with a look that would fain have been a smile, 'The world has run so light and easy with me hitherto, that you see I don't know how to bear with trouble. All thinking and managing fell to my Maggie's share, and I had as little care on my hands as one of my own boys—poor fellows. I don't know how it is to turn out, but of all the men on earth to be left with eleven children, I should choose myself as the worst.'

Alan tried to say somewhat of 'Confidence—affection—daughters,' and broke down, but it did as well as if it had been connected.

'Yes, yes,' said the Doctor, 'they are good children, everyone of them. There's much to be thankful for, if one could only pluck up heart to feel it.'

'And you are convinced that Marga—that Miss May is recovering.'

'She has made a great advance to-day. The head is right, at least,' but the Doctor looked anxious, and spoke low, as he said, 'I am not satisfied about her yet. That want of power over the limbs is more than the mere shock and debility, as it seems to me, though Ward thinks otherwise, and I trust he is right; but I cannot tell yet as to the spine. If this should not soon mend, I shall have Fleet to see her. He was a fellow-student of mine, very clever, and I have more faith in him than in anyone else in that line!'

'By all means— Yes—' said Alan, excessively shocked. 'But you will let me know how she goes on—Richard will be so kind.'

'We will not fail,' said Dr. May, more and more touched at the sight of the young sailor struggling in vain to restrain his emotion; 'you shall hear. I'll write myself, as soon as I can use my hand, but I hope she may be all right long before that is likely to be.'

'Your kindness—' Alan attempted to say, but began again.

Feeling as I must—' then interrupting himself. 'I beg your pardon, 'tis no fit time, nor fit—But you'll let me hear.'

'That I will,' said Dr. May, and as Alan hastily left the room, he continued, half aloud, to himself, 'Poor boy! poor fellow! I see. No wonder! Heaven grant I have not been the breaking of their two young hearts, as well as my own! Maggie looked doubtful—as much as she ever did when my mind was set on a thing, when I spoke of bringing him here. But after all, she liked him as much as the rest of us did—she could not wish it otherwise—he is one of a thousand, and worthy of our Margaret. That he is! and Maggie thinks so. If he gets on in his profession, why then we shall see—' but the sigh of anguish of mind, here showed that the wound had but been forgotten for one moment.

'Pshaw! What am I running on to? I'm all astray for want of her! My poor girl—'

Mr. Ernescliffe set out before sunrise. The boys were up to wish him good-bye, and so were Etheldred and Mary, and some one else, for while the shaking of hands was going on in the hall, there was a call 'Mr. Ernescliffe,' and over the balusters peeped a little rough curly head, a face glowing with carnation deepened by sleep, and a round, plump, bare arm and shoulder; and down at Alan's feet there fell a construction of white and pink paper, while a voice lisped out, 'Mr. Ernescliffe, there's a white rothe for you.'

An indignant 'Miss Blanche!' was heard behind, and there was no certainty that any thanks reached the poor little heroine, who was evidently borne off summarily to the nursery, while Ethel gave way to a paroxysm of suppressed laughter, joined in, more or less, by all the rest; and thus Alan, promising faithfully to preserve the precious token, left Dr. May's door, not in so much outward sorrow as he had expected.

Even their father laughed at the romance of the white 'rothe,' and declared Blanche was a dangerous young lady; but the story was less successful with Miss Winter, who gravely said it was no wonder, since Blanche's elder sister had been setting her the example of forwardness in coming down in this way after Mr. Ernescliffe. Ethel was very angry, and was only prevented from vindicating herself, by remembering there was no peace-maker now, and that she had resolved only to think of Miss Winter's late kindness, and bear with her tiresome ways.

Etheldred thought herself too sorrowful to be liable to her usual faults, which would seem so much worse now; but she found herself more irritable than usual, and doubly heedless, because her mind was pre-occupied. She hated herself, and suffered more from sorrow than even at the first moment, for now she felt what it was to have no one to tame her, no eye over her; she found herself going *à tort et à travers* all the morning, and with no one to set her right. Since it was so the first day, what would follow?

Mary was on the contrary so far subdued, as to be exemplary in goodness and diligence, and Blanche was always steady. Flora was too busy to think of the school-room, for the whole house was on her hands, beside the charge of Margaret, while Dr. May went to the hospital, and to sundry patients, and they thought he seemed the better for the occupation, as well as gratified and affected by the sympathy he everywhere met with, from high and low.

The boys were at school, unseen except when at the dinner play-hour, Norman ran home to ask after his father and sister, but the most trying time was at eight in the evening, when they came home. That was wont to be the merriest part of the whole day, the whole family collected, papa at leisure and ready for talk or for play, mamma smiling over her work-basket, the sisters full of chatter, the brothers full of fun, all the tidings of the day discussed, and nothing unwelcome but bed-time. How different now! The Doctor was with Margaret, and though Richard tried to say something cheerful, as his brothers entered, there was no response, and they sat down on the opposite sides of the fire, forlorn and silent, till Richard who was painting some letters on card-board to supply the gaps in Aubrey's ivory Alphabet, called Harry to help him; but Ethel, as she sat at work, could only look at Norman, and wish she could devise anything likely to gratify him.

After a time Flora came down, and laying some sheets of closely written note paper before her sister, said, 'Here is dear mamma's unfinished letter to aunt Flora. Papa says we elder ones are to read it. It is a description of us all, and very much indeed we ought to learn from it. I shall keep a copy of it.'

Flora took up her work, and began to consult with Richard, while Ethel moved to Norman's side, and kneeling so as to lean against his shoulder, as he sat on a low cushion, they read their mother's last letter, by the fire-light, with indescribable feelings, as they went through the subjects that had lately occupied them, related by her who would never be among them again. After much of this kind, for her letters to Mrs. Arnott were almost journals, came,

'You say it is long since you had a portrait gallery of the chicken daisies, and if I do not write in these leisure days, you will hardly get it after I am in the midst of business again. The new Daisy is like Margaret at the same age—may she continue like her! Pretty creature, she can hardly be more charming than at present. Aubrey, the moon-faced, is far from reconciled to his deposition from babyhood; he is a sober, solemn gentleman, backward in talking, and with such a will of his own, as will want much watching; very different from Blanche, who is Flora over again, perhaps prettier, and more fairy-like, unless this is only one's admiration for the buds of the present season. None of them has ever been so winning as this little maid, who even attracts Dr. Hoxton himself, and obtains sugar-plums and kisses. "Rather she than I," says Harry, but notice is notice to the white Mayflower, and there is my anxiety—I am afraid it is not wholesome to be too engaging ever to get a rebuff. I hope having a younger sister, and outgrowing baby charms may be salutary. Flora soon left off thinking about

her beauty, and the fit of vanity does less harm at five than fifteen. My poor Tom has not such a happy life as Blanche, he is often in trouble at lessons, and bullied by Harry at play, in spite of his champion, Mary; and yet I cannot interfere, for it is good for him to have all this preparatory teasing, before he goes into school. He has good abilities, but not much perseverance or energy, and I must take the teaching of him into my own hands till his school days begin, in hopes of instilling them. The girlishness and timidity will be knocked out of him by the boys, I suppose; Harry is too kind and generous to do more than tease him moderately, and Norman will see that it does not go too far. It is a common saying that Tom and Mary made a mistake, that he is the girl, and she the boy, for she is a rough, merry creature, the noisiest in the house, always skirmishing with Harry in defence of Tom, and yet devoted to him, and wanting to do everything he does. Those two, Harry and Mary, are exactly alike, except for Harry's curly mane of lion-coloured wig. The "yellow haired laddie" is papa's name for Harry, which he does not mind from him, though furious if the girls attempt to call him so. Harry is the thorough boy of the family, all spirit, recklessness, and mischief, but so true, and kind, and noble-hearted, that one loves him the better after every freely confessed scrape. I cannot tell you how grateful I am to my boy for his perfect confidence, the thing that chiefly lessens my anxiety for him in his half-school, half-home life, which does not seem to me to work quite well with him. There are two sons of Mrs. Anderson's at the school, who are more his friends than I like, and he is too easily led by the desire not to be out-done, and to show that he fears nothing. Lately, our sailor-guest has inspired him with a vehement wish to go to sea; I wish it was not necessary that the decision should be made so early in life, for this fault is just what would make us most fear to send him into the world very young, though in some ways it might not do amiss for him.

'So much for the younger bairns, whom you never beheld, dear Flora. The three whom you left, when people used to waste pity on me for their being all babies together, now look as if any pair of them were twins, for Norman is the tallest, almost outgrowing his strength, and Ethel's sharp face, so like her papa's, makes her look older than Flora. Norman and Ethel do indeed take after their papa, more than any of the others, and are much alike. There is the same brilliant cleverness, the same strong feeling, not easy of demonstration, though impetuous in action; but poor Ethel's old foibles, her harum-scarum nature, quick temper, uncouth manners, and heedlessness of all but one absorbing object, have kept her back, and caused her much discomfort; yet I sometimes think these manifest defects have occasioned a discipline that is the best thing for the character in the end. They are faults that show themselves, and which one can tell how to deal with, and I have full confidence that she has the principle within her that will conquer them.'

'If—' mournfully sighed Ethel; but her brother pointed on further.

'My great hope is her entire indifference to praise—not approval, but praise. If she has not come up to her own standard, she works on, not always with good temper, but perseveringly, and entirely unheeding of commendation till she has satisfied herself, only thinking it stupid not to see the faults. It is this independence of praise that I want to see in her brother and sister. They justly earn it, and are rightly pleased with it; but I cannot feel sure whether they do not depend on it too much. Norman lives, like all school-boys, a life of emulation, and has never met with anything but success. I do believe Dr. Hoxton and Mr. Wilmot are as proud of him as we are; and he has never shown any tendency to conceit, but I am afraid he has the love of being foremost, and pride in his superiority, caring for what he is, compared with others, rather than what he is himself.'

‘I know,’ said Norman; ‘I have done so, but that’s over. I see what it is worth. I’d give all the *quam optimè* I ever got in my life to be the help Richard is to papa.’

‘You would if you were his age.’

‘Not I, I’m not the sort. I’m not like her. But are we to go on about the elders?’

‘Oh! yes, don’t let us miss a word. There can’t be anything but praise of them.’

‘Your sweet goddaughter. I almost feel as if I had spoken in disparagement of her, but I meant no such thing, dear girl. It would be hard to find a fault in her, since the childish love of admiration was subdued. She is so solid and steady, as to be very valuable with the younger ones, and is fast growing so lovely, that I wish you could behold her. I do not see any vanity, but there lies my dread, not of beauty-vanity, but that she will find temptation in the being everywhere liked and sought after. As to Margaret, my precious companion and friend, you have heard enough of her to know her, and, as to telling you what she is like, I could as soon set about describing her papa. When I thought of not being spared to them this time, it was happiness indeed to think of her at their head, fit to be his companion, with so much of his own talent as to be more up to conversation with him, than he could ever have found his stupid old Maggie. It was rather a trial of her discretion to have Mr. Ernescliffe here while I was up-stairs, and very well she seems to have come out of it. Poor Richard’s last disappointment is still our chief trouble. He has been working hard with a tutor all through the vacation, and has not even come home to see his new sister, on his way to Oxford. He had made a resolution that he would not come to us, till he had passed, and his father thought it best that it should be kept. I hope he will succeed next time, but his nervousness renders it still more doubtful. With him it is the very reverse of Norman. He suffers too much for want of commendation, and I cannot wonder at it, when I see how much each failure vexes his father, and Richard little knows how precious is our perfect confidence in him, how much more valuable than any honours he could earn. You would be amused to see how little he is altered from the pretty little fair fellow, that you used to say, was so like my old portrait, even the wavy rings of light glossy hair sit on his forehead, just as you liked to twist them; and his small trim figure is a fine contrast to Norman’s long legs and arms, which—’

There the letter broke off, the playful affection of the last words making it almost more painful to think that the fond hand would never finish the sentence.

CHAPTER VI.

‘A drooping daisy changed into a cup,
In which her bright-eyed beauty is shut up.’

WORDSWORTH.

‘So there you are up for the day—really you look very comfortable,’ said Ethel, coming into the room where Margaret lay on her bed, half raised by pillows, supported by a wooden frame.

‘Yes, is not it a charming contrivance of Richard’s? It quite gives me the use of my hands,’ said Margaret.

'I think he is doing something else for you,' said Ethel; 'I heard him carpentering at six o'clock this morning, but I suppose it is to be a secret.'

'And don't you admire her night-cap?' said Flora.

'Is it anything different?' said Ethel, peering closer. 'O, I see—so she has a fine day-night-cap. Is that your taste, Flora?'

'Partly,' said Margaret, 'and partly my own. I put in all these little white puffs, and I hope you think they do me credit. Wasn't it grand of me?'

'She only despises you for them,' said Flora.

'I'm very glad you could,' said Ethel gravely; 'but do you know? it is rather like that horrid old lady in some book, who had a paralytic stroke, and the first thing she did that showed she had come to her senses was to write, "Rose-coloured curtains for the Doctors."''

'Well, it was for the Doctor,' said Margaret, 'and it had its effect. He told me I looked much better when he found me trying it on.'

'And did you really have the looking-glass and try it on?' cried Ethel.

'Yes, really,' said Flora. 'Don't you think one may as well be fit to be seen if one is ill? It is no use to depress one's friends by being more forlorn and disconsolate than one can help.'

'No—not disconsolate,' said Ethel; 'but the white puffiness—and the hemming—and the glass!'

'Poor Ethel can't get over it,' said Margaret. 'But, Ethel, do you think there is nothing disconsolate in untidiness?'

'You could be tidy without the little puffs! Your first bit of work too! Don't think I'm tiresome. If they were an amusement to you, I am sure I am very glad of them, but I can't see the sense of them.'

'Poor little things!' said Margaret laughing. 'It is only my foible for making a thing look nice. And, Ethel,' she added, drawing her down close over her, 'I did not think the trouble wasted, if seeing me look fresher cheered up dear papa a moment.'

'I spoke to papa about nurse's proposal,' said Margaret presently to Flora, 'and he quite agrees to it. Indeed it is impossible that Anne should attend properly to all the children while nurse is so much engaged with me.'

'I think so,' said Flora; 'and it does not answer to bring Aubrey into the school-room. It only makes Mary and Blanche idle, and Miss Winter does not like it.'

'Then the question is, who shall it be? Nurse has no one in view, and only protests against "one of the girls out of the school here."''

'That's a great pity,' said Flora. 'Don't you think we could make her take to Jane White, she is so very nice.'

'I thought of her, but it will never answer if we displease nurse

Besides, I remember at the time Anne came, dear mamma thought there was danger of a girl's having too many acquaintances, especially taking the children out walking. We cannot always be sure of sending her out with Anne.'

'Do you remember'—said Ethel, there stopping.

'Well,' said both sisters.

'Don't you recollect, Flora, that girl whose father was in the hospital—that girl at Cocks Moor?'

'I do,' said Flora. 'She was a very nice girl; I wonder whether nurse would approve of her.'

'How old?' said Margaret.

'Fourteen, and tall. Such a clean cottage!'

The girls went on, and Margaret began to like the idea very much, and consider whether the girl could be brought for inspection, before nurse was prejudiced by hearing of her Cocks Moor extraction. At that moment Richard knocked at the door, and entered with Tom, helping him to bring a small short-legged table, such as could stand on the bed at the right height for Margaret's meals or employments.

There were great exclamations of satisfaction, and gratitude; 'it was the very thing wanted, only how could he have contrived it?'

'Don't you recognise it?' said he.

'O, I see; it is the old drawing-desk that no one used. And you have put legs to it—how famous! You are the best contriver, Richard!'

'Then see, you can raise it up for reading or writing; here's a corner for your ink to stand flat; and there it is down for your dinner.'

'Charming, you have made it go so easily, when it used to be so stiff. There—give me my work-basket, please, Ethel; I mean to make some more white puffs.'

'What's the matter now, Ethel?' said Flora; 'you look as if you did not approve of the table.'

'I was only thinking it was as if she was settling herself to lie in bed for a very long time,' said Ethel.

'I hope not,' said Richard; 'but I don't see why she should not be as comfortable as she can, while she is there.'

'I am sure I hope you will never be ill, Ethel,' said Flora. 'You would be horrid to nurse!'

'She will know how to be grateful when she is,' said Margaret.

'I say, Richard,' exclaimed Ethel, 'this is hospital-meeting day so you won't be wanted to drive papa.'

'No, I am at your service; do you want a walk?'

So it was determined that Richard and Ethel should walk together to Cocks Moor.

No two people could be much more unlike than Richard and Etheldred May; but they were very fond of each other. Richard was sometimes seriously annoyed by Ethel's heedlessness, and did not always understand her sublimities, but he had a great deal of admiration for one who partook so much of his father's nature; and Ethel

had a due respect for her eldest brother, gratitude and strong affection for many kindnesses, a reverence for his sterling goodness, and his exemption from her own besetting failings, only a little damped by her compassionate wonder at his deficiency in talent, and by her vexation at not being always comprehended.

They went by the road, for the plantation gate was far too serious an undertaking for any one not in the highest spirits for enterprise. On the way there was a good deal of that desultory talk, very sociable and interesting, that is apt to prevail between two people, who would never have chosen each other for companions, if they were not of the same family, but who are nevertheless very affectionate and companionable. Ethel was anxious to hear what her brother thought of papa's spirits, and whether he talked in their drives.

'Sometimes,' said Richard. 'It is just as it happens. Now and then he goes on just like himself, and then at other times he will not speak for three or four miles.'

'And he sighs?' said Ethel. 'Those sighs are so very sad, and long, and deep! They seem to have whole volumes in them, as if there was such a weight on him.'

'Some people say he is not as much altered as they expected,' said Richard.

'Oh! do they? Well! I can't fancy any one feeling it more. He can't leave off his old self, of course, but'—Ethel stopped short.

'Margaret is a great comfort to him,' said Richard.

'That she is. She thinks of him all day long, and I don't think either of them is ever so happy as in the evening, when he sits with her. They talk about mamma then'—

It was just what Richard could not do, and he made some observation to change the subject, but Ethel returned to it, so far as to beg to know how the arm was going on, for she did not like to say any thing about it to papa.

'It will be a long business, I am afraid,' said Richard. 'Indeed, he said the other day, he thought he should never have the free use of the elbow.'

'And do you think it is very painful? I saw the other day, when Aubrey was sitting on his knee and fidgetting, he shrank whenever he even came towards it, and yet it seemed as if he could not bear to put him down.'

'Yes, it is excessively tender, and sometimes gets very bad at night.'

'Ah,' said Ethel, 'there's a line—here—round his eyes, that there never used to be, and when it deepens, I am sure he is in pain, or has been kept awake.'

'You are very odd, Ethel; how do you see things in people's faces, when you miss so much at just the same distance?'

'I look after what I care about,' said Ethel. 'One sees more with one's mind than one's eyes. The best sight is inside.'

'But do you always see the truth?' said Richard gravely.

‘Quite enough. What is less common than the ordinary world?’ said Ethel.

Richard shook his head, not quite satisfied, but not sure enough that he entered into her meaning to question it.

‘I wonder you don’t wear spectacles,’ was the result of his meditation, and it made her laugh by being so inapposite to her own reflections; but the laugh ended in a melancholy look. ‘Dear mamma did not like me to use them,’ she said in a low voice.

Thus they talked till they arrived at Cocksmoor, where poor Mrs. Taylor, inspirited by better reports of her husband and the hopes for her daughter, was like another woman. Richard was very careful not to raise false expectations, saying it all depended on Miss May and nurse, and what they thought of her strength and steadiness, but these cautions did not seem capable of damping the hopes of the smooth-haired Lucy, who stood smiling and curtsying. The twins were grown and improved, and Ethel supposed they would be brought to Church on the next Christening Sunday, but their mother looked helpless and hopeless about getting them so far, and how was she to get gossips? Ethel began to grow very indignant, but she was always shy of finding fault with poor people to their faces when she would not have done so to persons in her own station, and so she was silent, while Richard hoped they would be able to manage, and said it would be better not to wait another month for still worse weather and shorter days.

As they were coming out of the house, a big, rough-looking, uncivilized boy came up before them, and called out, ‘I say—ben’t you the young Doctor up at Stoneborough?’

‘I am Dr. May’s son,’ said Richard; while Ethel, startled, clung to his arm, in dread of some rudeness.

‘Granny’s bad,’ said the boy; proceeding without further explanation to lead the way to another hovel, though Richard tried to explain that the knowledge of medicine was not in his case hereditary. A poor old woman sat groaning over the fire, and two children crouched, half-clothed on the bare floor.

Richard’s gentle voice and kind manner drew forth some wonderful descriptions—‘her head was all of a goggle, her legs all of a fur, she felt as if some one was cutting right through her.’

‘Well,’ said Richard kindly, ‘I am no Doctor myself, but I’ll ask my father about you, and perhaps he can give you an order for the hospital.’

‘No, no, thank ye, Sir; I can’t go to the hospital, I can’t leave these poor children; they’ve no father nor mother, Sir, and no one to do for them but me.’

‘What do you all live on, then?’ said Richard, looking round the desolate hut.

‘On Sam’s wages, Sir; that’s that boy. He is a good boy to me, Sir, and his little sisters; he brings it, all he gets, home to me,

rig'lar, but 'tis but six shillings a week, and they makes him take half of it out in goods and beer, which is a bad thing for a boy like him, Sir.

“How old are you, Sam?”

Sam scratched his head, and answered nothing. His grand mother knew he was the age of her black bonnet, and as he looked about fifteen, Ethel honoured him and the bonnet accordingly, while Richard said he must be very glad to be able to maintain them all, at his age, and, promising to try to bring his father that way, since prescribing at second hand for such curious symptoms was more than could be expected, he took his leave.

‘A wretched place,’ said Richard, looking round. ‘I don’t know what help there is for the people. There’s no one to do any thing for them, and it’s of no use to tell them to come to Church when it is so far off, and there is so little room for them.’

‘It is miserable,’ said Ethel; and all her thoughts during her last walk thither began to rush over her again, not effaced, but rather burnt in, by all that had subsequently happened. She had said it should be her aim and effort to make Cocks Moor a Christian place. Such a resolve, must not pass away lightly; she knew it must be acted on, but how? What would her present means—one sovereign—effect? Her fancies, rich and rare, had nearly been forgotten of late, but she might make them of use in time—in time, and here were lives of children growing up in heathenism. Suddenly an idea struck her—Richard, when at home, was a very diligent teacher in the Sunday-school at Stoneborough, though it was a thankless task, and he was the only gentleman so engaged, except the two Clergymen—the other male teachers being a formal, grave, little baker, and one or two monitors.

‘Richard,’ said Ethel, ‘I’ll tell you what. Suppose we were to set up a Sunday-school at Cocks Moor. We could get a room, and walk there every Sunday afternoon, and go to Church in the evening instead.’

He was so confounded by the suddenness of the project, that he did not answer, till she had time for several exclamations and ‘Well, Richard!’

‘I cannot tell,’ he said. ‘Going to Church in the evening would interfere with tea-time—put out all the house—make the evening uncomfortable.’

‘The evenings are horrid now, especially Sundays,’ said Ethel.

‘But missing two more would make them worse for the others.’

‘Papa is always with Margaret,’ said Ethel. ‘We are of no use to him. Besides those poor children—are not they of more importance?’

‘And, then, what is to become of Stoneborough school?’

‘I hate it,’ exclaimed Ethel; then seeing Richard shocked, and finding she had spoken more vehemently than she intended—‘It is not as bad for you among the boys, but while that committee goes on, it is not the least use to try to teach the girls right. Oh! the

fusses about the books, and one's way of teaching! And fancy how Mrs. Ledwich used us. You know I went again last Sunday, for the first time, and there I found that class of Margaret's, that she had just managed to get into some degree of nice order, taken so much pains with, taught so well. She had been telling me what to hear them—there it is given away to Fanny Anderson, who is no more fit to teach than that stick, and all Margaret's work will be undone. No notice to us—not even the civility to wait and see when she gets better.'

'If we left them now for Cocks Moor, would it not look as if we were affronted?'

Ethel was slightly taken aback, but only said, 'Papa would be very angry if he knew it.'

'I am glad you did not tell him,' said Richard.

'I thought it would only tease him,' said Ethel, 'and that he might call it a petty female squabble; and when Margaret is well, it will come right if Fanny Anderson has not spoilt the girls in the meantime. It is all Mrs. Ledwich's doing. How I did hate it when every one came up and shook hands with me, and asked after Margaret and papa, only just out of curiosity!'

'Hush, hush, Ethel, what's the use of thinking such things?'

A silence,—then she exclaimed, 'But, indeed, Richard, you don't fancy that I want to teach at Cocks Moor, because it is disagreeable at Stoneborough?'

'No, indeed.'

The rendering of full justice conveyed in his tone, so opened Ethel's heart, that she went on eagerly:—'The history of it is this. Last time we walked here, *that* day, I said, and I meant it, that I would never put it out of my head; I would go on doing and striving, and trying, till this place was properly cared for, and has a Church and a Clergyman. I believe it was a vow, Richard, I do believe it was,—and if one makes one, one must keep it. There it is. So, I can't give money, I have but one pound in the world, but I have time, and I would make that useful, if you would help me.'

'I don't see how' was the answer, and there was a fragment of a smile on Richard's face, as if it struck him as a wild scheme, that Ethel should undertake, single-handed, to evangelize Cocks Moor.

It was such a damper as to be most mortifying to an enthusiastic girl, and she drew into herself in a moment.

They walked home in silence, and when Richard warned her that she was not keeping her dress out of the dirt, it sounded like a sarcasm on her projects, and, with a slightly pettish manner, she raised the unfortunate skirt, its crape trimmings greatly bespattered with ruddy mud. Then recollecting how mamma would have shaken her head at that very thing, she regretted the temper she had betrayed, and in a '*larmoyante*' voice, sighed, 'I wish I could pick my way better. Some people have the gift, you have hardly a splash, and I'm up to the ancles in mud.'

‘It is only taking care,’ said Richard; ‘besides your frock is so long, and full. Can’t you tuck it up, and pin it?’

‘My pins always come out,’ said Ethel, disconsolately, crumpling the black folds into one hand, while she hunted for a pin with the other.

‘No wonder, if you stick them in that way,’ said Richard. ‘Oh! you’ll tear that crape. Here, let me help you. Don’t you see, make it go in and out, that way; give it something to pull against.’

Ethel laughed. ‘That’s the third thing you have taught me—to thread a needle, tie a bow, and stick in a pin! I never could learn those things of anyone else; they show, but don’t explain the theory.’

They met Dr. May at the entrance of the town, very tired, and saying he had been a long tramp, all over the place, and Mrs. Hoxton had been boring him with her fancies. As he took Richard’s arm he gave the long heavy sigh that always fell so painfully on Ethel’s ear.

‘Dear, dear, dear papa!’ thought she, ‘my work must also be to do all I can to comfort him.’

Her reflections were broken off. Dr. May exclaimed, ‘Ethel, don’t make such a figure of yourself. Those muddy ancles and petticoats are not fit to be seen—there, now you are sweeping the pavement. Have you no medium? One would think you had never worn a gown in your life before!’

Poor Ethel stepped on before with mud-encrusted heels, and her father speaking sharply in the weariness and soreness of his heart; her draggle-tailed petticoats weighing down at once her missionary projects at Cocksmoor, and her tender visions of comforting her widowed father; her heart was full to overflowing, and where was the mother to hear her troubles?

She opened the hall door, and would have rushed up-stairs, but nurse happened to be crossing the hall. ‘Miss Ethel! Miss Ethel, you arn’t going up with them boots on! I do declare you are just like one of the boys. And your frock!’

Ethel sat submissively down on the lowest step, and pulled off her boots. As she did so, her father and brother came in—the former desiring Richard to come with him to the study, and write a note for him. She hoped that thus she might have Margaret to herself, and hurried into her room. Margaret was alone, maids and children at tea, and Flora dressing. The room was in twilight, with the red gleam of the fire playing cheerfully over it.

‘Well, Ethel, have you had a pleasant walk?’

‘Yes—no—Oh Margaret!’ and throwing herself across the bottom of the bed, she burst into tears.

‘Ethel, dear, what is the matter? Papa—’

‘No—no—only I dragged my frock, and Richard threw cold water. And I am good for nothing! Oh! if mamma was but here!’

‘Darling Ethel, dear Ethel, I wish I could comfort you. Come a

little nearer to me, I can't reach you. Dear Ethel, what has gone wrong?'

'Every thing,' said Ethel. 'No—I'm too dirty to come on your white bed; I forgot, you won't like it,' added she, in an injured tone.

'You are wet, you are cold, you are tired,' said Margaret. 'Stay here and dress, don't go up in the cold. There, sit by the fire, pull off your frock and stockings, and we will send for the others. Let me see you look comfortable—there. Now tell me who threw cold water.

'It was figurative cold water,' said Ethel, smiling for a moment. 'I was only silly enough to tell Richard my plan, and it's horrid to talk to a person who only thinks one high-flying and nonsensical—and then came the dirt.'

'But what was the scheme, Ethel?'

'Cocksmoor,' said Ethel, proceeding to unfold it.

'I wish we could,' said Margaret. 'It would be an excellent thing. But how did Richard vex you?'

'I don't know,' said Ethel, 'only he thought it would not do. Perhaps he said right, but it was coldly, and he smiled.'

'He is too sober-minded for our flights,' said Margaret. 'I know the feeling of it, Ethel dear; but you know if he did see that some of your plans might not answer, it is no reason you should not try to do something at once. You have not told me about the girl.'

Ethel proceeded to tell the history. 'There!' said Margaret, cheerfully, 'there are two ways of helping Cocksmoor already. Could you not make some clothes for the two grand-children? I could help you a little, and then, if they were well clothed, you might get them to come to the Sunday-school. And as to the twins, I wonder what the hire of a cart would be to bring the Christening party? It is just what Richard could manage.'

'Yes,' said Ethel; 'but those are only little isolated individual things!'

'But one must make a beginning.'

'Then, Margaret, you think it was a real vow? You don't think it silly of me?' said Ethel, wistfully.

'Ethel, dear, I don't think dear mamma would say we ought to make vows, except what the Church decrees for us. I don't think she would like the notion of your considering yourself pledged; but I do think, that, after all you have said and felt about Cocksmoor, and being led there on that day, it does seem as if we might be intended to make it our especial charge.'

'O Margaret, I am glad you say so. You always understand.'

'But you know we are so young, that now we have not her to judge for us, we must only do little things that we are quite sure of, or we shall get wrong.'

'That's not the way great things were done.'

'I don't know, Ethel; I think great things can't be good unless they stand on a sure foundation of little ones.'

‘Well, I believe Richard was right, and it would not do to begin on Sunday, but he was so tame; and then my frock, and the horrid deficiency in those little neatnesses.’

‘Perhaps that is good for you in one way; you might get very high-flying if you had not the discipline of those little tiresome things; correcting them will help you, and keep your high things from being all romance. I know dear mamma used to say so; that the trying to conquer them was a help to you. O, here’s Mary! Mary, will you get Ethel’s dressing things? She has come home wet-footed and cold, and has been warming herself by my fire.’

Mary was happy to help, and Ethel was dressed and cheered by the time Dr. May came in, for a hurried visit and report of his doings; Flora followed on her way from her room. Then all went to tea, leaving Margaret to have a visit from the little ones under charge of nurse. Two hours’ stay with her, that precious time when she knew that sad as the talk often was, it was truly a comfort to him. It ended when ten o’clock struck, and he went down—Margaret hearing the bell, the sounds of the assembling servants, the shutting of the door, the stillness of prayer time, the opening again, the feet moving off in different directions, then brothers and sisters coming in to kiss her and bid her good-night, nurse and Flora arranging her for the night, Flora coming to sleep in her little bed in a corner of the room, and, lastly, her father’s tender good-night, and melancholy look at her, and all was quiet, except the low voices and movements as Richard attended him in his own room.

Margaret could think: ‘Dear, dear Ethel, how noble and high she is! But I am afraid! It is what people call a difficult, dangerous age, and the grander she is, the greater danger of not managing her rightly. If those high purposes should run only into romance like mine, or grow out into eccentricities and unfemininities, what a grievous pity it would be! And I, so little older, so much less clever, with just sympathy enough not to be a wise restraint—I am the person who has the responsibility, and oh, what shall I do? Mamma trusted to me to be a mother to them, papa looks to me, and I so unfit, besides this helplessness. But God sent it, and put me in my place. He made me lie here, and will raise me up if it is good, so I trust He will help me with my sisters.’

‘Grant me to have a right judgment in all things, and evermore to rejoice in Thy holy comfort.’

CHAPTER VII.

'Something between a hindrance and a help.'

WORDSWORTH.

ETHELDRED awoke long before time for getting up, and lay pondering over her visions. Margaret had sympathized, and therefore they did not seem entirely aerial. To earn money by writing was her favourite plan, and she called her various romances in turn before her memory, to judge which might be brought down to sober pen and ink. She considered till it became not too unreasonably early to get up. It was dark, but there was a little light close to the window: she had no writing-paper, but she would interline her old exercise-book. Down she ran, and crouching in the school-room window-seat, she wrote on in a trance of eager composition, till Norman called her, as he went to school, to help him to find a book.

This done, she went up to visit Margaret, to tell her the story, and consult her. But this was not so easy. She found Margaret with little Daisy lying by her, and Tom sitting by the fire over his Latin.

'O Ethel, good morning, dear! you are come just in time.'

'To take baby?' said Ethel as the child was fretting a little.

'Yes, thank you, she has been very good, but she was tired of lying here, and I can't move her about,' said Margaret.

'O Margaret, I have such a plan,' said Ethel, as she walked about with little Gertrude; but Tom interrupted.

'Margaret, will you see if I can say my lesson?' and the thumbed Latin grammar came across her just as Dr. May's door opened, and he came in exclaiming, 'Latin grammar! Margaret, this is really too much for you. Good morning, my dears. Ha! Tommy, take your book away, my boy. You must not inflict that on sister now. There's your regular master, Richard, in my room, if it is fit for his ears yet. What, the little one here too?'

'How is your arm, papa?' said Margaret. 'Did it keep you awake?'

'Not long—it set me dreaming though, and a very romantic dream it was, worthy of Ethel herself.'

'What was it, papa?'

'O, it was an odd thing, joining on strangely enough with one I had three or four-and-twenty years ago, when I was a young man, hearing lectures at Edinburgh, and courting'—he stopped, and felt Margaret's pulse, asked her a few questions, and talked to the baby. Ethel longed to hear his dream, but thought he would not like to go on; however, he did presently.

'The old dream was the night after a pic-nic on Arthur's Seat with the Mackenzies; Mamma and Aunt Flora were there. 'Twas a regular boy's dream, a tournament or something of that nature,

where I was victor, the queen—you know who she was—giving me her token—a Daisy Chain.'

'That is why you like to call us your Daisy Chain,' said Ethel.

'Did you write it in verse?' said Margaret. 'I think I once saw some verses like it in her desk.'

'I was in love, and three-and-twenty,' said the Doctor, looking drolly guilty in the midst of his sadness. 'Aye, those fixed it in my memory, perhaps my fancy made it more distinct than it really was. An evening or two ago, I met with them, and that stirred it up, I suppose. Last night came the tournament again, but it was the *mélee*, a sense of being crushed down, suffocated by the throng of armed knights and horses—pain and wounds—and I looked in vain through the opposing overwhelming host for my—my Maggie. Well, I got the worst of it, my sword arm was broken—I fell, was stifled—crushed—in misery—all I could do was to grasp my token—my Daisy Chain,' and he pressed Margaret's hand as he said so. 'And, behold, the tumult and despair were passed. I lay on the grass in the cloisters, and the Daisy Chain hung from the sky, and was drawing me upwards. There—it is a queer dream for a sober old country Doctor. I don't know why I told you, don't tell any one again.'

And he walked away, muttering, 'For he told me his dreams, talked of eating and drinking,' leaving Margaret with her eyes full of tears, and Ethel vehemently caressing the baby.

'How beautiful!' said Ethel.

'It has been a comfort to him, I am sure,' said Margaret.

'You don't think it ominous,' said Ethel, with a slight tremulous voice.

'More soothing than any thing else. It is what we all feel, is it not? that this little daisy bud is the link between us and heaven?'

'But about him. He was victor at first—vanquished the next time?'

'I think—if it is to have an interpretation, though I am not sure we ought to take it so seriously, it would only mean that in younger days, people care for victory and distinction in this world, like Norman, or as papa most likely did then; but, as they grow older, they care less, and others pass them, and they know it does not signify, for in our race all may win.'

'But he has a great name. How many people come from a distance to consult him! he is looked upon, too, in other ways! he can do anything with the corporation.'

Margaret smiled. 'All this does not sound grand—it is not as if he had set up in London.'

'Oh dear, I am so glad he did not.'

'Shall I tell you what mamma told me he said about it, when uncle Mackenzie said he ought? He answered, that he thought

health and happy home attachments, were a better provision for us to set out in life with than thousands.'

'I am sure he was right!' said Ethel, earnestly. 'Then you don't think the dream meant being beaten, only that our best things are not gained by successes in this world?'

'Don't go and let it dwell on your mind as a vision,' said Margaret. 'I think dear mamma would call that silly.'

An interruption occurred, and Ethel had to go down to breakfast with a mind floating between romance, sorrow, and high aspirations, very unlike the actual world she had to live in. First, there was a sick man walking into the study, and her father, laying down his letters, saying, 'I must despatch him before prayers, I suppose. I've a great mind to say I never will see any one who wont keep to my days.'

'I can't imagine why they don't, said Flora, as he went. 'He is always saying so, but never acting on it. If he would once turn one away, the rest would mind.'

Richard went on in silence, cutting bread and butter.

'There's another ring,' said Mary.

'Yes, he is caught now, they'll go on in a stream. I shall not keep Margaret waiting for her breakfast, I shall take it up.'

The morning was tiresome; though Dr. May had two regular days for seeing poor people at his house, he was too good-natured to keep strictly to them, and this day, as Flora had predicted, there was a procession of them not soon got rid of, even by his rapid queries and the talismanic figures made by his left hand on scraps of paper, with which he sent them off to the infirmary. Ethel tried to read; the children lingered about; it was a trial of temper to all but Tom, who obtained Richard's attention to his lessons. He liked to say them to his brother, and this was an incentive to learn them quickly, that none might remain for Miss Winter when Richard went out for his father. If mamma had been there, she would have had prayers; but now no one had authority enough, though they did at last even finish breakfast. Just as the gig came to the door, Dr. May dismissed his last patient, rang the bell in haste, and as soon as prayers were over, declared he had an appointment, and had no time to eat. There was a general outcry, that it was bad enough when he was well, and now he must not take liberties; Flora made him drink some tea; and Richard placed morsels in his way, while he read his letters. He ran up for a final look at Margaret, almost upset the staid Miss Winter as he ran down again, called Richard to take the reins, and was off.

It was French day, always a trial to Ethel. M. Ballompré, the master, knew what was good and bad French, but could not render a reason, and Ethel being versed in the principles of grammar, from her Latin studies, chose to know the why and wherefore of his corrections—she did not like to see her pages de-

facéd, and have no security against future errors; while he thought her a troublesome pupil, and was put out by her questions. They wrangled, Miss Winter was displeaséd, and Ethel felt injuréd.

Mary's inability to catch the pronounciation, and her hopeless dull look when she found that *cœur* must not be pronouncéd *cour*, nor *cur*, but something between, to which her rosy English lips could never come—all this did not tease M. Ballompré, for he was uséd to it.

His mark for Ethel's lesson was '*de l'humour.*'

'I am sorry,' said Miss Winter, when he was gone. 'I thought you had outgrown that habit of disputing over every phrase.'

'I can't tell how a language is to be learnt without knowing the reasons of one's mistakes,' said Ethel.

'That is what you always say, my dear. It is of no use to renew it all, but I wish you would control yourself. Now, Mary, call Blanche, and you and Ethel take your arithmetic.'

So Flora went to read to Margaret, while Blanche went lightly and playfully through her easy lessons, and Mary floundered piteously over the difficulties of Compound Long Division. Ethel's mind was in too irritated and tumultuous a state for her to derive her usual solace from Cube Root. Her sum was wrong, and she wanted to work it right, but Miss Winter, who had little liking for the higher branches of arithmetic, said she had spent time enough over it, and summonéd her to an examination such as the governess was very fond of and often practiséd. Ethel thought it useless, and was teased by it; and though her answers were chiefly correct, they were given in an irritated tone. It was of this kind:—

What is the date of the invention of paper?

What is the latitude and longitude of Otaheite?

What are the component parts of brass?

Whence is cochineal imported?

When this was over, Ethel had to fetch her mending-basket, and Mary her book of selections; the piece for to-day's lesson was the quarrel of Brutus and Cassius; and Mary's dull droning tone was a trial to her ears; she presently exclaimed, 'O Mary, don't murder it!'

'Murder what?' said Mary, opening wide her light blue eyes.

'That use of exaggerated language,'—began Miss Winter.

'I've heard Papa say it,' said Ethel, only wanting to silence Miss Winter. In a cooler moment, she would not have uséd the argument.

'All that a gentleman may say, may not be a precedent for a young lady; but you are interrupting Mary.'

'Only let me show her. I can't bear to hear her, listen, Mary.'

'What shall one of us

That struck the foremost?'

'That is declaiming,' said Miss Winter. 'It is not what we wish for in a lady. You are neglecting your work and interfering.'

Ethel made a fretful contortion, and obeyed. So it went on all the morning, Ethel's eagerness checked by Miss Winter's dry manner, producing pettishness, till Ethel, in a state between self-reproach and a sense of injustice, went up to prepare for dinner, and to visit Margaret on the way.

She found her sister picking a merino frock to pieces. 'See here,' she said eagerly, 'I thought you would like to make up this old frock for one of the Cocksmoor children; but what is the matter?' as Ethel did not show the lively interest that she expected.

'O nothing, only Miss Winter is so tiresome.'

'What was it?'

'Every thing, it was all horrid. I was cross I know, but she and M. Ballompré made me so;' and Ethel was in the midst of the narration of her grievances, when Norman came in. The school was half a mile off, but he had not once failed to come home, in the interval allowed for play after dinner, to inquire for his sister.

'Well, Norman, you are out of breath, sit down and rest. What is doing at school? are you *dux* of your class?'

'Yes,' said the boy, wearily.

'What mark for the verses?' said Ethel.

'*Quam benè.*

'Not *optime*?'

'No, they were *tame*,' Dr. Hoxton said.

'What is Harry doing?'

'He is fourth in his form. I left him at football.'

'Dinner!' said Flora at the door. 'What will you have, Margaret?'

'I'll fetch it,' said Norman, who considered it his privilege to wait on Margaret at dinner. When he had brought the tray, he stood leaning against the bed-post, musing. Suddenly, there was a considerable clatter of fire-irons, and his violent start surprised Margaret.

'Ethel has been poking the fire,' she said, as if no more was needed to account for their insecurity. Norman put them up again, but a ringing sound betrayed that it was not with a firm touch, and when, a minute after, he came to take her plate, she saw that he was trying with effort to steady his hand.

'Norman, dear, are you sure you are well?'

'Yes, very well,' said he, as if vexed that she had taken any notice.

'You had better not come racing home. I'm not worth inquiries now, I am so much better,' said she smiling.

He made no reply, but this was not consenting silence.

'I don't like you to lose your foot-ball,' she proceeded.

'I could not—' and he stopped short.

'It would be much better for you,' said she, looking up in his face with anxious affectionate eyes, but he shunned her glance and walked away with her plate.

Flora had been in such close attendance upon Margaret, that she needed some cheerful walks, and though she had some doubts how affairs at home would go on without her, she was overruled, and sent on a long expedition with Miss Winter and Mary, while Ethel remained with Margaret.

The only delay before setting out, was that nurse came in, saying, 'If you please, Miss Margaret, there is a girl come to see about the place.'

The sisters looked at each other and smiled, while Margaret asked whence she came, and who she was.

'Her name is Taylor, and she comes from Cocks Moor, but she is a nice, tidy, strong-looking girl, and she says she has been used to children.'

Nurse had fallen into a trap most comfortably, and seemed bent upon taking this girl as a choice of her own. She wished to know if Miss Margaret would like to see her.

'If you please, nurse, but if you think she will do, that is enough.'

'Yes, Miss, but you should look to them things yourself. If you please, I'll bring her up.' So nurse departed.

'Charming!' cried Ethel, 'that's your capital management, Flora; Nurse thinks she has done it all herself.'

'She is your charge though,' said Flora, 'coming from your own beloved Cocks Moor.'

Lucy Taylor came in, looking very nice, and very shy, curtsying low, in extreme awe of the pale lady in bed. Margaret was much pleased with her, and there was no more to be done but settle that she should come on Saturday, and to let nurse take her into the town to invest her with the universal blackness of the household, where the two Margarets were the only white things.

This arranged, and the walking party set forth, Ethel sat down by her sister's bed, and began to assist in unpicking the merino, telling Margaret how much obliged she was to her for thinking of it, and how grieved at having been so ungrateful in the morning. She was very happy over her contrivances, cutting out under her sister's superintendence. She had forgotten the morning's annoyance, till Margaret said, 'I have been thinking of what you said about Miss Winter, and really I don't know what is to be done.'

'O Margaret, I did not mean to worry you,' said Ethel, sorry to see her look uneasy.

'I like you to tell me every thing, dear Ethel; but I don't see clearly the best course. We must go on with Miss Winter.'

'Of course,' said Ethel, shocked at her murmurs having even suggested the possibility of a change, and having, as well as all the others, a great respect and affection for her governess.

'We could not get on without her, even if I were well,' continued Margaret; 'and dear mamma had such perfect trust in her, and we all know and love her so well—it would make us put up with a great deal.'

'It is all my own fault,' said Ethel, only anxious to make amends to Miss Winter. 'I wish you would not say any thing about it.'

'Yes, it does seem wrong even to think of it,' said Margaret, 'when she has been so very kind. It is a blessing to have any one to whom Mary and Blanche may so entirely be trusted. But for you—'

'It is my own fault,' repeated Ethel.

'I don't think it is quite all your own fault,' said Margaret, 'and that is the difficulty. I know dear mamma thought Miss Winter an excellent governess for the little ones, but hardly up to you, and she saw that you worried and fidgetted each other, so, you know, she used to keep the teaching of you a good deal in her own hands.'

I did not know that was the reason,' said Ethel, overpowered by the recollection of the happy morning's work she had often done in that very room, when her mother had not been equal to the bustle of the whole school-room. That watchful, protecting, guarding, mother's love, a shadow of Providence, had been round them so constantly on every side, that they had been hardly conscious of it till it was lost to them.

'Was it not like her?' said Margaret, 'but now, my poor Ethel, I don't think it would be right by you or by Miss Winter, to take you out of the school-room. I think it would grieve her.'

'I would not do that for the world.'

'Especially after all her kind nursing of me, and even, with more reason, it would not be becoming in us to make changes. Besides, King Etheldred,' said Margaret, smiling, 'we all know you are a little bit of a sloven, and, as nurse says, some one must be always after you, and do you know? even if I were well, I had rather it was Miss Winter than me.'

'O no, you would not be formal and precise—you would not make me cross.'

'Perhaps you might make me so,' said Margaret, 'or I should let you alone, and leave you a slattern. We should both hate it so! No, don't make me your mistress, Ethel dear,—let me be your sister and play-fellow still, as well as I can.'

'You are, you are. I don't care half so much when I have got you.'

'And will you try to bear with her, and remember it is right in the main, though it is troublesome?'

'That I will. I won't plague you again. I know it is bad for you, you look tired.'

'Pray don't leave off telling me,' said Margaret—'it is just what I wish on my own account, and I know it is comfortable to have a good grumble.'

'If it does not hurt you, but I am sure you are not easy now—are you?'

'Only my back,' said Margaret. 'I have been sitting up longer than usual, and it is tired. Will you call nurse to lay me flat again?'

The nursery was deserted—all were out, and Ethel came back in

trepidation at the notion of having to do it herself, though she knew it was only to put one arm to support her sister, while, with the other, she removed the pillows; but Ethel was conscious of her own awkwardness and want of observation, nor had Margaret entire trust in her. Still she was too much fatigued to wait, so Ethel was obliged to do her best. She was careful and frightened, and therefore slow and unsteady. She trusted that all was right, and Margaret tried to believe so, though still uneasy.

Ethel began to read to her, and Dr. May came home. She looked up smiling, and asked where he had been, but it was vain to try to keep him from reading her face. He saw in an instant that something was amiss, and drew from her a confession that her back was aching a little. He knew she might have said a great deal—she was not in a comfortable position—she must be moved. She shook her head—she had rather wait—there was a dread of being again lifted by Ethel, that she could not entirely hide. Ethel was distressed, Dr. May was angry, and, no wonder, when he saw Margaret suffer, felt his own inability to help, missed her who had been wont to take all care from his hands, and was vexed to see a tall strong girl of fifteen, with the full use of both arms, and plenty of sense, incapable of giving any assistance, and only doing harm by trying.

‘It is of no use,’ said he. ‘Ethel will give no attention to any thing but her books! I’ve a great mind to put an end to all the Latin and Greek! She cares for nothing else.’

Ethel could little brook injustice, and much as she was grieving, she exclaimed, ‘Papa, papa, I do care—now don’t I, Margaret? I did my best!’

‘Don’t talk nonsense. Your best, indeed! If you had taken the most moderate care—’

‘I believe Ethel took rather too much care,’ said Margaret, much more harassed by the scolding than by the pain. ‘It will be all right presently. Never mind, dear Papa.’

But he was not only grieved for the present, but anxious for the future; and, though he knew it was bad for Margaret to manifest his displeasure, he could not restrain it, and continued to blame Ethel with enough of injustice to set her on vindication, whereupon he silenced her, by telling her she was making it worse by self-justification when Margaret ought to be quiet. Margaret tried to talk of other things, but was in too much discomfort to exert herself enough to divert his attention.

At last Flora returned, and saw in an instant what was wanted. Margaret was settled in the right posture, but the pain would not immediately depart, and Dr. May soon found out that she had a headache, of which he knew he was at least as guilty as Etheldred could be.

Nothing could be done but keep her quiet, and Ethel went away to be miserable; Flora tried to comfort her by saying it was unfortunate, but no doubt there was a knack, and every one could not man

age those things; Margaret was easier now, and as to Papa's anger, he did not always mean all he said.

But consolation came at bed-time; Margaret received her with open arms when she went to wish her good-night. 'My poor Ethel,' she said, holding her close, 'I am sorry I have made such a fuss.'

'Oh, you did not, it was too bad of me—I am grieved; are you quite comfortable now?'

'Yes, quite, only a little head-ache, which I shall sleep off. It has been so nice and quiet. Papa took up George Herbert, and has been reading me choice bits. I don't think I have enjoyed any thing so much since I have been ill.'

'I am glad of that, but I have been unhappy all the evening. I wish I knew what to do. I am out of heart about every thing!'

'Only try to mind and heed, and you will learn. It will be a step if you will only put your shoes side by side when you take them off.'

Ethel smiled and sighed, and Margaret whispered, 'Don't grieve about me, but put your clever head to rule your hands, and you will do for home and Cocks Moor too. Good-night, dearest.'

'I've vexed papa,' sighed Ethel—and just then he came into the room.

'Papa,' said Margaret, 'here's poor Ethel, not half recovered from her troubles.'

He was now at ease about Margaret, and knew he had been harsh to another of his motherless girls.

'Ah! we must send her to the infant-school, to learn "this is my right hand, and this is my left,"' said he, in his half-gay, half-sad manner.

'I was very stupid,' said Ethel.

'Poor child!' said her papa, 'she is worse off than I am. If I have but one hand left, she has two left-hands.'

'I do mean to try, papa.'

'Yes, you must, Ethel. I believe I was hasty with you, my poor girl. I was vexed, and we have no one to smooth us down. I am sorry, my dear, but you must bear with me, for I never learnt *her* ways with you when I might. We will try to have more patience with each other.'

What could Ethel do but hang round his neck and cry, till he said, but tenderly, that they had given Margaret quite disturbance enough to-day, and sent her to bed, vowing to watch each little actier, lest she should again give pain to such a father and sister.

CHAPTER VIII.

'Tis not enough that Greek or Roman page
 At stated hours, his freakish thoughts engage,
 Even in his pastimes he requires a friend
 To warn and teach him safely to unbend,
 O'er all his pleasures gently to preside,
 Watch his emotions, and control their tide.'

COWPER.

THE misfortunes of that day disheartened and disconcerted Etheldred. To do mischief where she most wished to do good, to grieve where she longed to comfort, seemed to be her fate; it was vain to attempt any thing for any one's good, while all her warm feelings and high aspirations were thwarted by the awkward ungainly hands, and heedless eyes that Nature had given her. Nor did the following day, Saturday, do much for her comfort, by giving her the company of her brothers. That it was Norman's sixteenth birthday seemed only to make it worse. Their father had apparently forgotten it, and Norman stopped Blanche, when she was going to put him in mind of it; stopped her by such a look as the child never forgot, though there was no anger in it. In reply to Ethel's inquiry what he was going to do that morning, he gave a yawn and stretch, and said, dejectedly, that he had got some Euripides to look over, and some verses to finish.

'I am sorry; this is the first time you ever have not managed so as to make a real holiday of your Saturday!'

'I could not help it, and there's nothing to do,' said Norman, wearily.

'I promised to go and read to Margaret, while Flora does her music,' said Ethel; 'I shall come after that and do my Latin and Greek with you.'

Margaret would not keep her long, saying she liked her to be with Norman, but she found him with his head sunk on his open book, fast asleep. At dinner-time, Harry and Tom, rushing in, awoke him with a violent start.

'Halloo! Norman, that was a jump!' said Harry, as his brother stretched and pinched himself. 'You'll jump out of your skin some of these days, if you don't take care!'

'It's enough to startle any one to be waked up with such a noise,' said Ethel.

'Then he ought to sleep at proper times,' said Harry, 'and not be waking me up with tumbling about, and hallooing out, and talking in his sleep half the night.'

'Talking in his sleep; why, just now, you said he did not sleep,' said Ethel.

'Harry knows nothing about it,' said Norman.

'Don't I? well, I only know, if you slept in school, and were a

junior, you would get a proper good licking for going on as you do at night.'

'And I think you might chance to get a proper good licking for not holding your tongue,' said Norman, which hint reduced Harry to silence.

Dr. May was not come home; he had gone with Richard far into the country, and was to return to tea. He was thought to be desirous of avoiding the family dinners that used to be so delightful. Harry was impatient to depart, and when Mary and Tom ran after him, he ordered them back.

'Where can he be going?' said Mary, as she looked wistfully after him.

'I know,' said Tom.

'Where? Do tell me.'

'Only don't tell papa. I went down with him to the play-ground this morning, and there they settled it. The Andersons, and Axworthy, and he, are going to hire a gun, and shoot pee-wits on Cocks-moor.'

'But they ought not; should they?' said Mary. 'Papa would be very angry.'

'Anderson said there was no harm in it, but Harry told me not to tell. Indeed, Anderson would have boxed my ears for hearing, when I could not help it.'

'But Harry would not let him?'

'Aye. Harry is quite a match for Harvey Anderson, though he is so much younger; and he said he would not have me bullied.'

'That's a good Harry! But I wish he would not go out shooting!' said Mary.

'Mind, you don't tell.'

'And where's Hector Ernescliffe? Would not he go?'

'No. I like Hector. He did not choose to go, though Anderson teased him, and said he was a poor Scot, and his brother didn't allow him tin enough to buy powder and shot. If Harry would have stayed at home, he would have come up here, and we might have had some fun in the garden.'

'I wish he would. We never have any fun now,' said Mary; 'but oh! there he is;' as she spied Hector peeping over the gate which led, from the field, into the garden. It was the first time that he had been to Dr. May's since his brother's departure, and he was rather shy, but the joyful welcome of Mary and Tom took off all reluctance, and they claimed him for a good game at play in the wood house. Mary ran up-stairs to beg to be excused the formal walk, and, luckily for her, Miss Winter was in Margaret's room. Margaret asked if it was very wet and dirty, and hearing 'not very,' gave gracious permission, and off went Mary and Blanche to construct some curious specimens of pottery, under the superintendence of Hector and Tom. There was a certain ditch where yellow mud was attainable, whereof

the happy children concocted marbles and vases, which underwent a preparatory baking in the boys' pockets, that they might not crack in the nursery fire. Margaret only stipulated that her sisters should be well fenced in brown holland, and when Miss Winter looked grave said, 'Poor things, a little thorough play will do them a great deal of good.'

Miss Winter could not see the good of groping in the dirt; and Margaret perceived that it would be one of her difficulties to know how to follow out her mother's views for the children, without vexing the good governess by not deferring to her.

In the meantime, Norman had disconsolately returned to his Euripides, and Ethel, who wanted to stay with him and look out his words, was ordered out by Miss Winter, because she had spent all yesterday in-doors. Miss Winter was going to stay with Margaret, and Ethel and Flora coaxed Norman to come with them, 'just one mile on the turnpike road and back again; he would be much fresher for his Greek afterwards.'

He came, but he did not enliven his sisters. The three plodded on, taking a diligent constitutional walk, exchanging very few words, and those chiefly between the girls. Flora gathered some hoary elematis, and red berries, and sought in the hedge-sides for some crimson 'fairy baths' to carry home; and, at the sight of the amusement Margaret derived from the placing the beauteous little Pezizas in a saucer of damp green moss, so as to hide the brown sticks on which they grew, Ethel took shame to herself for want of perception of little attentions. When she told Norman so, he answered, 'There's no one who does see what is the right thing. How horrid the room looks! Every thing is no how!' added he, looking round at the ornaments and things on the tables, which had lost their air of comfort and good taste. It was not disorder, and Ethel could not see what he meant. 'What's wrong?' said she.

'O never mind—you can't do it. Don't try—you'll only make it worse. It will never be the same as long as we live.'

'I wish you would not be so unhappy!' said Ethel.

'Never mind,' again said Norman, but he put his arm round her.

'Have you done your Euripides? Can I help you? Will you construe it with me, or shall I look out your words?'

'Thank you, I don't mind that. It is the verses! I want some sense!' said Norman, running his fingers through his hair till it stood on end. 'Tis such a horrid subject, Coral Islands! As if there was anything to be said about them.'

'Dear me, Norman, I could say ten thousand things, only I must not tell you what mine are, as yours are not done.'

'No, don't,' said Norman, decidedly.

'Did you read the description of them in the Quarterly? I am sure you might get some ideas there. Shall I find it for you? It is in an old number.'

‘Well, do; thank you—’

He rested listlessly on the sofa while his sister rummaged in a chiffoniere. At last she found the article, and eagerly read him the description of the strange forms of the coral animals, and the beauties of their flower-like feelers and branching fabrics. It would once have delighted him, but his first comment was, ‘Nasty little brutes!’ However, the next minute he thanked her, took the book, and said he could hammer something out of it, though it was too bad to give such an unclassical subject. At dusk he left off, saying he should get it done at night, his senses would come then, and he should be glad to sit up.

‘Only three weeks to the holidays,’ said Ethel, trying to be cheerful; but his assent was depressing, and she began to fear that Christmas would only make them more sad.

Mary did not keep Tom’s secret so inviolably, but that, while they were dressing for tea, she revealed to Ethel where Harry was gone. He was not yet returned, though his father and Richard were come in, and the sisters were at once in some anxiety on his account, and doubt whether they ought to let papa know of his disobedience.

Flora and Ethel, who were the first in the drawing-room, had a consultation.

‘I should have told mamma directly,’ said Flora.

‘He never did so,’ sighed Ethel, ‘things never went wrong then.’

‘O yes, they did; don’t you remember how naughty Harry was about climbing the wall, and making faces at Mrs. Richardson’s servants?’

‘And how ill I behaved the first day of last Christmas holidays?’

‘She knew, but I don’t think she told papa.’

‘Not that we knew of, but I believe she did tell him everything, and I think, Flora, he ought to know everything, especially now. I never could bear the way the Mackenzies used to have of thinking their parents must be like enemies, and keeping secrets from them.’

‘They were always threatening each other, “I’ll tell mamma,”’ said Flora, ‘and calling us tell-tales because we told our own dear mamma everything. But it is not like that now—I neither like to worry papa, nor to bring Harry into disgrace—besides, Tom and Mary meant it for a secret.’

‘Papa would not be angry with him if we told him it was a secret,’ said Ethel; ‘I wish Harry would come in. There’s the door—oh! it is only you.’

‘Whom did you expect?’ said Richard, entering.

The sisters looked at each other, and Ethel, after an interval, explained their doubts about Harry.

‘He is come in,’ said Richard; ‘I saw him running up to his own room, very muddy.’

‘O, I’m glad! But do you think papa ought to hear it? I don’t know what’s to be done. ’Tis the children’s secret,’ said Flora.

'It will never do to have him going out with those boys continually,' said Ethel—'Harvey Anderson close by all the holidays!'

'I'll try what I can do with him,' said Richard. 'Papa had better not hear it now, at any rate. He is very tired and sad this evening! and his arm is painful again, so we must not worry him with histories of naughtiness among the children.'

'No,' said Ethel, decidedly, 'I am glad you were there, Ritchie; I never should have thought of one time being better than another.'

'Just like Ethel!' said Flora, smiling.

'Why should you not learn?' said Richard gently.

'I can't,' said Ethel, in a desponding way.

'Why not? You are much sharper than most people, and, if you tried, you would know those things much better than I do, as you know how to learn history.'

'It is quite a different sort of cleverness,' said Flora. 'Recollect Sir Isaac Newton, or Archimedes.'

'Then you must have both sorts,' said Ethel, 'for you can do things nicely, and yet you learn very fast.'

'Take care, Ethel, you are singeing your frock! Well, I really don't think you can help those things!' said Flora. 'Your short sight is the reason of it, and it is of no use to try to mend it.'

'Don't tell her so,' said Richard. 'It can't be all short sight—it is the not thinking. I do believe that if Ethel would think, no one would do things so well. Don't you remember the beautiful perspective drawing she made of this room, for me to take to Oxford? That was very difficult, and wanted a great deal of neatness and accuracy, so why should she not be neat and accurate in other things? And I know you can read faces, Ethel—why don't you look there before you speak?'

'Ah! before instead of after, when I only see I have said something *mal-à-propos*,' said Ethel.

'I must go and see about the children,' said Flora; 'if the tea comes while I am gone, will you make it, Ritchie?'

'Flora despairs of me,' said Ethel.

'I don't,' said Richard. 'Have you forgotten how to put in a pin yet?'

'No; I hope not.'

'Well, then, see if you can't learn to make tea; and, by-the-by, Ethel, which is the next Christening Sunday?'

'The one after next, surely. The first of December is Monday—yes, to-morrow week is the next.'

'Then I have thought of something; it would cost eighteen-pence to hire Joliffe's spring-cart, and we might have Mrs. Taylor and the twins brought to Church in it. Should you like to walk to Cocks-moor and settle it?'

'O yes, very much indeed. What a capital thought. Margaret said you would know how to manage.'

‘Then we will go the first fine day papa does not want me.’

‘I wonder if I could finish my purple frocks. But here’s the tea. Now, Richard, don’t tell me to make it. I shall do something wrong, and Flora will never forgive you.’

Richard would not let her off. He stood over her, counted her shovelfull of tea, and watched the water into the teapot—he superintended her warming the cups, and putting a drop into each saucer. ‘Ah!’ said Ethel, with a concluding sigh, ‘it makes one hotter than double equations!’

It was all right, as Flora allowed with a slightly superior smile. She thought Richard would never succeed in making a notable or elegant woman of Ethel, and it was best that the two sisters should take different lines. Flora knew that, though clever and with more accomplishments, she could not surpass Ethel in intellectual attainments, but she was certainly far more valuable in the house, and had been proved to have just the qualities in which her sister was most deficient. She did not relish hearing that Ethel wanted nothing but attention to be more than her equal, and she thought Richard mistaken. Flora’s remembrance of their time of distress was less unmingledly wretched than it was with the others, for she knew she had done wonders.

The next day Norman told Ethel that he had got on very well with the verses, and finished them off late at night. He showed them to her before taking them to school on Monday morning, and Ethel thought they were the best he had ever written. There was too much spirit and poetical beauty, for a mere school-boy task, and she begged for the foul copy, to show it to her father. ‘I have not got it,’ said Norman. ‘The foul copy was not like these; but when I was writing them out quite late, it was all, I don’t know how. Flora’s music was in my ears, and the room seemed to get larger, and like an ocean cave; and when the candle flickered, ’twas like the green glowing light of the sun through the waves.’

‘As it says here,’ said Ethel.

‘And the words all came to me of themselves in beautiful flowing Latin, just right, as if it was anybody but myself doing it, and they ran off my pen in red and blue and gold, and all sorts of colours; and fine branching zig-zagging stars, like what the book described, only stranger, came dancing and radiating round my pen and the candle. I could hardly believe the verses would scan by daylight, but I can’t find a mistake. Do you try them again.’

Ethel scanned. ‘I see nothing wrong,’ she said, ‘but it seems a shame to begin scanning Undine’s verses, they are too pretty. I wish I could copy them. It must have been half a dream.’

‘I believe it was; they don’t seem like my own.’

‘Did you dream afterwards?’

He shivered. ‘They had got into my head too much; my ears rang like the roaring of the sea, and I thought my feet were frozen

on to an iceberg: then came darkness, and sea-monsters, and drowning—it was too horrid!’ and his face expressed all, and more than all, he said. ‘But ’tis a quarter to seven—we must go,’ said he, with a long yawn, and rubbing his eyes. ‘You are sure they are right Ethel? Harry, come along.’

Ethel thought those verses ought to make a sensation, but all that came of them was a *Quam optimè*, and when she asked Norman if no special notice had been taken of them, he said, in his languid way, ‘No; only Dr. Hoxton said they were better than usual.’

Ethel did not even have the satisfaction of hearing that Mr. Wilmot, happening to meet Dr. May, said to him, ‘Your boy has more of a poet in him than any that has come in my way. He really sometimes makes very striking verses.’

Richard watched for an opportunity of speaking to Harry, which did not at once occur, as the boy spent very little of his time at home, and, as if by tacit consent, he and Norman came in later every evening. At last, on Thursday, in the additional two hours’ leisure allowed to the boys, when the studious prepared their tasks, and the idle had some special diversion, Richard encountered him running up to his own room to fetch a newly-invented instrument for projecting stones.

‘I’ll walk back to school with you,’ said Richard.

‘I mean to run,’ returned Harry.

‘Is there so much hurry?’ said Richard. ‘I am sorry for it, for I wanted to speak to you, Harry; I have something to show you.’

His manner conveyed that it related to their mother, and the sobering effect was instantaneous. ‘Very well,’ said he, forgetting his haste. ‘I’ll come into your room.’

The awe-struck, shy, yet sorrowful look on his rosy face, showed preparation enough, and Richard’s only preface was to say, ‘It is a bit of a letter that *she* was in course of writing to aunt Flora, a description of us all. The letter itself is gone, but here is a copy of it. I thought you would like to read what relates to yourself.’

Richard laid before him the sheet of note paper on which this portion of the letter was written, and left him alone with it, while he set out on the promised walk with Ethel.

They found the old woman, Granny Hall, looking like another creature, smoke-dried and withered indeed, but all briskness and animation.

‘Well! be it you, Sir, and the young lady?’

‘Yes; here we are come to see you again,’ said Richard. ‘I hope you are not disappointed that I have brought my sister this time instead of the Doctor.’

‘No, no, Sir; I’ve done with the Doctor for this while,’ said the old woman, to Ethel’s great amusement. ‘He have done me a power of good, and thank him for it heartily; but the young lady is right welcome here—but ’tis a dirty walk for her.’

‘Never mind that,’ said Ethel, a little shyly, ‘I came—where are your grandchildren?’

‘O somewhere out among the blocks. They gets out with the other children; I can’t be always after them.’

‘I wanted to know if these would fit them,’ said Ethel, beginning to undo her basket.

‘Well, ’pon my word! If ever I see! Here!’ stepping out to the door, ‘Polly—Jenny! come in, I say, this moment! Come in, ye bad girls, or I’ll give you the stick; I’ll break every bone of you, that I will!’ all which threats were bawled out in such a good-natured, triumphant voice, and with such a delighted air, that Richard and Ethel could not help laughing.

After a few moments, Polly and Jenny made their appearance, extremely rough and ragged, but compelled by their grandmother to duck down, by way of courtesies, and with finger in mouth they stood, too shy to show their delight, as the garments were unfolded; Granny talking so fast that Ethel would never have brought in the stipulation, that the frocks should be worn to school and Church, if Richard, in his mild, but steady way, had not brought the old woman to listen to it. She was full of asseverations that they should go; she took them to Church sometimes herself, when it was fine weather and they had clothes, and they could say their catechiz as well as anybody already; yes, they should come, that they should, and next Sunday. Ethel promised to be there to introduce them to the chief lady, the president of the Committee, Mrs. Ledwich, and, with a profusion of thanks, they took leave.

They found John Taylor, just come out of the hospital, looking weak and ill, as he smoked his pipe over the fire, his wife bustling about at a great rate, and one of the infants crying. It seemed to be a great relief that they were not come to complain of Lucy, and there were many looks of surprise on hearing what their business really was. Mrs. Taylor thanked, and appeared not to know whether she was glad or sorry; and her husband, pipe in hand, gazed at the young gentleman as if he did not comprehend the species, since he could not be old enough to be a Clergyman.

Richard hoped they would find sponsors by that time; and there Mrs. Taylor gave little hope; it was a bad lot—there was no one she liked to ask to stand, she said, in a dismal voice; but there her husband put in, ‘I’ll find some one, if that’s all; my missus always thinks nobody can’t do nothing.’

‘To be sure,’ said the lamentable Mrs. Taylor, ‘all the elder ones was took to Church, and I’m loth the little ones shouldn’t; but you see, Sir, we are poor people, and it’s a long way, and they was set down in the gentleman’s register book.’

“But you know that is not the same, Mrs. Taylor. Surely Lucy could have told you that, when she went to school.”

‘No, Sir, ’tis not the same—I knows that; but this is a bad place to live in—’

‘Always the old song, Missus!’ exclaimed her husband. ‘Thank you kindly, Sir—you have been a good friend to us, and so was Dr. May, when I was up to the hospital, through the thick of his own troubles. I believe you are in the right of it, Sir, and thank you. The children shall be ready, and little Jack too, and I’ll find gossips, and let ’em be Christened on Sunday.’

‘I believe you will be glad of it,’ said Richard; and he went on to speak of the elder children coming to school, on Sunday, thus causing another whining from the wife about distance and bad weather, and no one else going that way. He said the little Halls were coming, but Mrs. Taylor began saying she disliked their company for the children—granny let them get about so much, and they said bad words. The father again interfered. Perhaps Mr. Wilmot, who acted as chaplain at the hospital, had been talking to him, for he declared at once that they should come; and Richard suggested that he might see them home when he came from Church; then, turning to the boy and girl, told them they would meet their sister Lucy, and asked them if they would not like that.

On the whole, the beginning was not inauspicious, though there might be a doubt whether old Mrs. Hall would keep all her promises. Ethel was so much diverted and pleased as to be convinced she would; Richard was a little doubtful as to her power over the wild girls. There could not be any doubt that John Taylor was in earnest, and had been worked upon just at the right moment; but there was danger that the impression would not last. ‘And his wife is such a horrible whining dawdle!’ said Ethel—‘there will be no good to be done if it depends on her.’

Richard made no answer, and Ethel presently felt remorseful for her harsh speech about a poor ignorant woman, overwhelmed with poverty, children, and weak health.

‘I have been thinking a great deal about what you said last time we took this walk,’ said Richard, after a considerable interval.

‘O, have you!’ cried Ethel, eagerly; and the black peaty pond she was looking at, seemed to sparkle with sunlight.

‘Do you really mean it?’ said Richard, deliberately.

‘Yes, to be sure;’ she said, with some indignation.

‘Because I think I see a way to make a beginning, but you must make up your mind to a great deal of trouble, and dirty walks, and you must really learn not to draggle your frock.’

‘Well, well; but tell me.’

‘This is what I was thinking. I don’t think I can go back to Oxford after Christmas. It is not fit to leave you while papa is so disabled.’

‘O no, he could not get on at all. I heard him tell Mr. Wilmot the other day that you were his right hand.’

Ethel was glad she had repeated this, for there was a deepening

colour and smiling glow of pleasure on her brother's face, such as she had seldom seen on his delicate, but somewhat impassive features.

'He is very kind!' he said, warmly. 'No, I am sure I cannot be spared till he is better able to use his arm, and I don't see any chance of that just yet. Then if I stay at home, Friday is always at my own disposal, while papa is at the hospital meeting.'

'Yes, yes, and we could go to Cocksmoor and set up a school. How delightful!'

'I don't think you would find it quite as delightful as you fancy,' said Richard; 'the children will be very wild and ignorant, and you don't like that at the National School.'

'O but they are in such need, besides there will be no Mrs. Ledwich over me. It is just right,—I shan't mind anything. You are a capital Ritchie, for having thought of it!'

'I don't think—if I am ever to be what I wish, that is, if I can get through at Oxford—I don't think it can be wrong to begin this, if Mr. Ramsden does not object.'

'O Mr. Ramsden does not object to anything.'

'And if Mr. Wilmot will come and set us off. You know we cannot begin without that, or without my father's fully liking it.'

'Oh! there can be no doubt of that!'

'This one thing, Ethel, I must stipulate. Don't you go and tell it all out at once to him. I cannot have him worried about our concerns.'

'But how—no one can question that this is right. I am sure he won't object.'

'Stop, Ethel, don't you see, it can't be done for nothing? If we undertake it, we must go on with it, and when I am away it will fall on you and Flora. Well, then, it ought to be considered whether you are old enough and steady enough; and if it can be managed for you to go continually all this way, in this wild place. There will be expense too.'

Ethel looked wild with impatience, but could not gainsay these scruples, otherwise than by declaring they ought not to weigh against the good of Cocksmoor.

'It will worry him to have to consider all this,' said Richard, 'and it must not be pressed upon him.'

'No, said Ethel, sorrowfully; 'but you don't mean to give it up.'

'You are always in extremes, Ethel. All I want is to find a good time for proposing it.'

She fidgetted and gave a long sigh.

'Mind,' said Richard, stopping short, 'I'll have nothing to do with it except on condition you are patient, and hold your tongue about it.'

'I think I can, if I may talk to Margaret.'

'O yes, to Margaret of course. We could not settle anything without her help.'

'And I know what she will say,' said Ethel. 'O I am so glad, and she jumped over three puddles in succession.'

'And, Ethel, you must learn to keep your frock out of the dirt.'

'I'll do anything, if you'll help me at Cocksmoor.'

CHAPTER IX.

'For the structure that we raise,
Time is with materials filled;
Our to-days and yesterdays,
Are the blocks with which we build.

Truly shape and fashion these,
Leave no yawning gaps between;
Think not, because no man sees,
Such things will remain unseen.'

LONGFELLOW.

WHEN Ethel came home, burning with the tidings of the newly-excited hopes for Cocksmoor, they were at once stopped by Margaret eagerly saying, 'Is Richard come in? pray call him;' then on his entrance, 'O, Richard, would you be so kind as to take this to the Bank. I don't like to send it by any one else—it is so much;' and she took from under her pillows a velvet bag, so heavy, that it weighed down her slender white hand.

'What, he has given you the care of his money?' said Ethel.

'Yes; I saw him turning something out of his waistcoat-pocket into the drawer of the looking-glass, and sighing in that very sad way. He said his fees had come to such an accumulation, that he must see about sending them to the Bank; and then he told me of the delight of throwing his first fee into dear mamma's lap, when they were just married, and his old uncle had given up to him, and how he had brought them to her ever since; he said she had spoiled him, by taking all trouble off his hands. He looked at it, as if it was so sorrowful to him to have to dispose of it, that I begged him not to plague himself any more, but let me see about it, as dear mamma used to do; so he said I was spoiling him too, but he brought me the drawer, and emptied it out here: when he was gone, I packed it up, and I have been waiting to ask Richard to take it all to the Bank, out of his sight.'

'You counted it?' said Richard.

'Yes—there's fifty—I kept seventeen toward the week's expenses. Just see that it is right,' said Margaret, showing her neat packets.

'Oh, Ritchie,' said Ethel, 'what can expense signify, when all that has been kicking about loose in an open drawer? What would one of those rolls do?'

'I think I had better take them out of your way,' said Richard, quietly. 'Am I to bring back the book to you, Margaret?'

'Yes, do,' said Margaret; 'pray do not teaze him with it.' And as her brother left the room, she continued, 'I wish he was better. I think he is more oppressed now than even at first. The pain of his arm, going on so long, seems to me to have pulled him down; it does not let him sleep, and, by the end of the day, he gets worn and fagged, by seeing so many people, and exerting himself to talk

and think ; and often, when there is something that must be asked, I don't know how to begin, for it seems as if a little more would be too much for him.'

'Yes, Richard is right,' said Ethel, mournfully; 'it will not do to press him about our concerns; but do you think him worse to-day?'

'He did not sleep last night, and he is always worse when he does not drive out into the country; the fresh air, and being alone with Richard, are a rest for him. To-day is especially trying; he does not think poor old Mr. Southern will get through the evening and he is so sorry for the daughter.'

'Is he there now?'

'Yes; he thought of something that might be an alleviation, and he would go, though he was tired. I am afraid the poor daughter will detain him, and he is not fit to go through such things now.'

'No, I hope he will soon come; perhaps Richard will meet him. But, O Margaret, what do you think Richard and I have been talking of?' and, without perception of fit times and seasons, Ethel would have told her story, but Margaret, too anxious to attend to her, said, 'Hark! was not that his step?' and Dr. May came in looking mournful and fatigued.

'Well,' said he, 'I was just too late. He died as I got there, and I could not leave the daughter till old Mrs. Bowers came.'

'Poor thing,' said Margaret. 'He was a good old man.'

'Yes,' said Dr. May sitting wearily down, and speaking in a worn-out voice. 'One can't lightly part with a man one has seen at Church every Sunday of one's life, and exchanged so many friendly words with over his counter. 'Tis a strong bond of neighbourliness in a small place like this, and, as one grows old, changes come heavier—"the clouds return again after the rain." Thank you, my dear,' as Ethel fetched his slippers, and placed a stool for his feet, feeling somewhat ashamed of thinking it an achievement to have, unbidden, performed a small act of attention which would have come naturally from any of the others.

'Papa, you will give me the treat of drinking tea with me?' said Margaret, who saw the quiet of her room would suit him better than the bustle of the children down stairs. 'Thank you,' as he gave a smile of assent.

That Margaret could not be made to listen this evening was plain, and all that Ethel could do, was to search for some books on schools. In seeking for them, she displayed such confusion in the chiffoniere, that Flora exclaimed, 'Oh, Ethel, how could you leave it so?'

'I was in a hurry, looking for something for Norman. I'll set it to rights,' said Ethel, gulping down her dislike to being reproved by Flora, with the thought that mamma would have said the same.

'My dear!' cried Flora presently, jumping up, 'what are you doing? piling up those heavy books on the top of the little ones; how do you think they will ever stand? let me do it.'

'No, no, Flora;' and Richard, in a low voice, gave Ethel some advice, which she received, seated on the floor, in a mood between temper and despair.

'He is going to teach her to do it on the principles of gravitation,' said Flora.

Richard did not do it himself, but, by his means, Ethel, without being in the least irritated, gave the chiffoniere a thorough dusting and setting-to-rights, sorting magazines, burning old catalogues, and finding her long-lost 'Undine,' at which she was so delighted, that she would have forgotten all, in proceeding to read it, curled up on the floor amongst the heaps of pamphlets, if another gentle hint from Richard had not made her finish her task so well, as to make Flora declare it was a pleasure to look in, and Harry pronounce it to be all neat and ship-shape.

There was no speaking to Margaret—the next morning—it was French day—and Ethel had made strong resolutions to behave better; and whether there were fewer idioms, or that she was trying to understand, instead of carping at the master's explanations, they came to no battle; Flora led the conversation, and she sustained her part with credit and gained an excellent mark.

Flora said afterwards to Margaret, 'I managed nicely for her. I would not let M. Ballompré blunder upon any of the subjects Ethel feels too deeply to talk of in good French, and really Ethel has a great talent for languages. How fast she gets on with Italian!'

'That she does,' said Margaret. 'Suppose you send her up, Flora—you must want to go and draw or practise, and she may do her arithmetic here, or read to me.'

It was the second time Margaret had made this proposal, and it did not please Flora, who had learned to think herself necessary to her sister, and liked to be the one to do everything for her. She was within six weeks of seventeen, and surely she need not be sent down again to the school-room, when she had been so good a manager of the whole family. She was fond of study and of accomplishments, but she thought she might be emancipated from Miss Winter; and it was not pleasant to her that a sister, only eighteen months older, and almost dependent on her, should have authority to dispose of her time.

'I practise in the evening,' she said, 'and I could draw here if I wished, but I have some music to copy.'

Margaret was concerned at the dissatisfaction, though not understanding the whole of it; 'You know, dear Flora,' she said, 'I need not take up all your time now.'

'Don't regret that,' said Flora. 'I like nothing so well as waiting on you, and I can attend to my own affairs very well here.'

'I'll tell you why I proposed it,' said Margaret. 'I think it would be a relief to Ethel to escape from Miss Winter's beloved Friday questions.'

‘Great nonsense they are,’ said Flora. ‘Why don’t you tell Miss Winter they are of no use?’

‘Mamma never interfered with them,’ said Margaret. ‘She only kept Ethel in her own hands, and if you would be so kind as to change sometimes and sit in the school-room, we could spare Ethel, without hurting Miss Winter’s feelings.’

‘I’ll call Ethel, if you like, but I shall go and practise in the drawing-room. The old school-room piano is fit for nothing but Mary to hammer upon.’

Flora went away, evidently annoyed, and Margaret’s conjectures on the cause of it, were cut short, by Ethel running in with a slate in one hand, and two books in the other, the rest having all tumbled down on the stairs.

‘O, Margaret, I am so glad to come to you. Miss Winter has set Mary to read “To be or not to be,” and it would have driven me distracted to have staid there. I have got a most beautiful sum in Compound Proportion, about a lion, a wolf, and a bear eating up a carcase, and as soon as they have done it, you shall hear me say my ancient geography, and then we will do a nice bit of Tasso; and if we have any time after that, I have got such a thing to tell you—only I must not tell you now, or I shall go on talking and not finish my lessons.’

It was not till all were done, that Ethel felt free to exclaim, ‘Now for what I have been longing to tell you—Richard is going to—’ But the fates were unpropitious. Aubrey trotted in expecting to be amused; next came Norman, and Ethel gave up in despair; and, after having affronted Flora in the morning, Margaret was afraid of renewing the offence, by attempting to secure Ethel as her companion for the afternoon; so not till after the walk, could Margaret contrive to claim the promised communication, telling Ethel to come and settle herself cosily by her.

‘I should have been very glad of you last evening,’ said she, ‘for papa went to sleep, and my book was out of reach.’

‘O, I am sorry; how I pity you, poor Margaret!’

‘I suppose I have grown lazy,’ said Margaret, ‘for I don’t mind those things now. I am never sorry for a quiet time to recollect and consider.’

‘It must be like the waiting in the dark between the slides of a magic lantern,’ said Ethel; ‘I never like to be quiet. I get so unhappy.’

‘I am glad of resting and recollecting,’ said Margaret. ‘It has all been so like a dream, that merry morning, and then, slowly waking to find myself here in dear mamma’s place, and papa watching over me. Sometimes I think I have not half understood what it really is, and that I don’t realize, that if I was up and about, I should find the house without her.’

‘Yes; that is the aching part!’ said Ethel. ‘I am happy, sitting

on her bed here with you. You are a little of her, besides being my own dear Peg-top! You are very lucky to miss the meal-times and the evenings.'

'That is the reason I don't feel it wrong to like to have papa sitting with me all the evening,' said Margaret, 'though it may make it worse for you to have him away. I don't think it selfish in me to keep him. He wants quiet so much, or to talk a little when it suits him; we are too many now, when he is tired.'

'O, it is best,' said Ethel. 'Nothing that you do is selfish—don't talk of it, dear Margaret. It will be something like old times when you come down again.'

'But all this time you are not telling me what I want so much to hear,' said Margaret, 'about Cocks Moor. I am so glad Richard has taken it up.'

'That he has. We are to go every Friday, and hire a room, and teach the children. Once a week will do a great deal, if we can but make them wish to learn. It is a much better plan than mine; for if they care about it, they can come to school here on Sunday.'

'It is excellent,' said Margaret, 'and if he is at home till Easter, it will give it a start, and put you in the way of it, and get you through the short days and dark evenings, when you could not so well walk home without him.'

'Yes, and then we can all teach; Flora, and Mary, and you, when you are well again. Richard says it will be disagreeable, but I don't think so—they are such unsophisticated people. That Granny Hall is such a funny old woman; and the whole place wants nothing but a little care, to do very well.'

'You must prepare for disappointments, dear Ethel.'

'I know; I know nothing is done without drawbacks; but I am so glad to make some beginning.'

'So am I. Do you know mamma and I were one day talking over those kind of things, and she said she had always regretted that she had so many duties at home, that she could not attend as much to the poor as she would like; but she hoped now we girls were growing up, we should be able to do more.'

'Did she?' was all Ethel said, but she was deeply gratified.

'I've been wanting to tell you. I knew you would like to hear it. It seems to set us to work so happily.'

'I only wish we could begin,' said Ethel, 'but Richard is so slow! Of course we can't act without papa's consent and Mr. Wilmot's help, and he says papa must not be worried about it, and he must watch for his own time to speak about it.'

'Yes,' said Margaret.

'I know—I would not have it otherwise; but what is tiresome is this. Richard is very good, but he is so dreadfully hard to stir up, and what's worse, so very much afraid of papa, that while he is

thinking about opportunities, they will all go by, and then it will be Easter, and nothing done!’

‘He is not so much afraid of papa as he was,’ said Margaret. ‘He has felt himself useful and a comfort, and papa is gentler; and that has cheered him out of the desponding way that kept him back from proposing anything.’

‘Perhaps,’ said Ethel; ‘but I wish it was you. Can’t you? you always know how to manage.’

‘No; it is Richard’s affair, and he must do as he thinks fit. Don’t sigh, dear Ethel—perhaps he may soon speak, and, if not, you can be preparing in a quiet way all the time. Don’t you remember how dear mamma used to tell us that things, hastily begun, never turn out well?’

‘But this is not hasty. I’ve been thinking about it these six weeks,’ said Ethel. ‘If one does nothing but think, it is all no better than a vision. I want to be doing.’

‘Well, you can be doing—laying a sound foundation,’ said Margaret. ‘The more you consider, and the wiser you make yourself, the better it will be when you do set to work.’

‘You mean by curing myself of my slovenly ways, and impatient temper?’

‘I don’t know that I was exactly thinking of that,’ said Margaret, ‘but that ought to be the way. If we are not just the thing in our niche at home, I don’t think we can do much real good elsewhere.’

‘It would be hollow, show-goodness,’ said Ethel. ‘Yes, that is true; and it comes across me now, and then what a horrid wretch I am, to be wanting to undertake so much, when I leave so much undone. But, do you know, Margaret, there’s no one such a help in those ways as Richard. Though he is so precise, he is never tiresome. He makes me see things, and do them neatly, without plaguing me, and putting me in a rage. I’m not ready to bite off my own fingers, or kick all the rattle-traps over and leave them, as I am, when Miss Winter scolds me, or nurse, or even Flora sometimes; but it is as if I was gratifying him, and his funny little old bachelor tidyisms divert me; besides, he teaches me the theory, and never lays hold of my poor fingers, and, when they won’t bend the wrong way, calls them frogs.’

‘He is a capital master for you,’ said Margaret, much amused and pleased, for Richard was her especial darling, and she triumphed in any eulogy from those who ordinarily were too apt to regard his dullness with superior compassion.

‘If he would only read our books, and enter into poetry and delight in it; but it is all nonsense to him,’ said Ethel. ‘I can’t think how people can be so different; but oh! here he comes Ritchie, you should not come upon us before we are aware.’

‘What? I should have heard no good of myself?’

Great good,' said Margaret—'she was telling me you would make a neat-handed woman of her in time.'

'I don't see why she should not be as neat as other people,' said Richard, gravely. 'Has she been telling you of our plan?'

And it was again happily discussed; Ethel, satisfied by finding him fully set upon the design, and Margaret giving cordial sympathy and counsel. When Ethel was called away, Margaret said, 'I am so glad you have taken it up, not only for the sake of Cocks-moor, but of Ethel. It is good for her not to spend her high soul in dreams.'

'I am afraid she does not know what she undertakes,' said Richard.

'She does not; but you will keep her from being turned back. It is just the thing to prevent her energies from running to waste; and her being so much with you, and working under you, is exactly what one would have chosen.'

'By contraries!' said Richard, smiling. 'That is what I was afraid of. I don't half understand or follow her, and when I think a thing nonsense, I see you all calling it very fine, and I don't know what to make of it—'

'You are making yourself out more dull than you are,' said Margaret, affectionately.

'I know I am stupid, and seem tame and cold,' said Richard, 'and you are the only one that does not care about it. That is what makes me wish Norman was the eldest. If I were as clever as he, I could do so much with Ethel, and be so much more to papa.'

'No, you would not. You would have other things in your head. You would not be the dear, dear old Ritchie that you are. You would not be a calm, cautious, steady balance to the quicksilver heads some of us have got. No, no, Norman's a very fine fellow, a very dear fellow, but he would not do half so well for our eldest—he is too easily up, and down again.'

'And I am getting into my old way of repining,' said Richard. 'I don't mind so much, since my father has at least one son to be proud of, and I can be of some use to him now.'

'Of the greatest, and to all of us. I am so glad you can stay after Christmas, and papa was pleased at your offering, and said he could not spare you at all, though he would have tried, if it had been any real advantage to you.'

'Well, I hope he will approve. I must speak to him as soon as I can find him with his mind tolerably disengaged.'

The scene that ensued that evening in the Magic Lantern before Margaret's bed, did not promise much for the freedom of her father's mind. Harry entered with a resolute manner. 'Margaret, I wanted to speak to you,' said he, spreading himself out, with an elbow on each arm of the chair. 'I want you to speak to papa about my

going to sea. It is high time to see about it—I shall be thirteen on the fourth of May.’

‘And you mean it seriously, Harry?’

‘Yes, of course I do, really and truly; and if it is to come to pass, it is time to take measures. Don’t you see, Margaret?’

‘It is time, as you say,’ answered Margaret, reflectingly, and sadly surveying the bright boy, rosy cheeked, round faced, and blue eyed, with the childish gladness of countenance, that made it strange that his lot in life should be already in the balance.

‘I know what you will all tell me, that it is a hard life, but I must get my own living some way or other, and I should like that way the best,’ said he, earnestly.

‘Should you like to be always far from home?’

‘I should come home sometimes, and bring such presents to Mary, and baby, and all of you; and I don’t know what else to be, Margaret. I should hate to be a Doctor—I can’t abide sick people; and I couldn’t write sermons, so I can’t be a Clergyman; and I won’t be a lawyer, I vow, for Harry Anderson is to be a lawyer—so there’s nothing left but soldiers and sailors, and I mean to be a sailor!’

“Well, Harry, you may do your duty, and try to do right, if you are a sailor, and that is the point.”

‘Aye, I was sure you would not set your face against it, now you know Alan Ernescliffe.’

‘If you were to be like him—’ Margaret found herself blushing, and broke off.

‘Then you will ask papa about it?’

‘You had better do so yourself. Boys had better settle such serious affairs with their fathers, without setting their sisters to interfere. What’s the matter, Harry—you are not afraid to speak to papa?’

‘Only for one thing,’ said Harry. ‘Margaret, I went out to shoot pee-wits last Saturday with two fellows, and I can’t speak to papa while that’s on my mind.’

‘Then you had better tell him at once.’

‘I knew you would say so; but it would be like a girl, and it would be telling of the two fellows.’

‘Not at all; papa would not care about them.’

‘You see,’ said Harry, twisting a little, ‘I knew I ought not; but they said I was afraid of a gun, and that I had no money. Now I see that was chaff, but I didn’t then, and Norman wasn’t there.’

‘I am so glad you have told me all this, Harry dear, for I knew you had been less at home of late, and I was almost afraid you were not going on quite well.’

‘That’s what it is,’ said Harry. ‘I can’t stand things at all, and I can’t go moping about as Norman does. I can’t live without

fun, and now Norman isn't there, half the time it turns to something I am sorry for afterwards.'

'But, Harry, if you let yourself be drawn into mischief here for want of Norman, what would you do at sea?'

'I should be an officer!'

'I am afraid,' said Margaret, smiling, 'that would not make much difference inside, though it might outside. You must get the self-control, and leave off being afraid to be said to be afraid.'

Harry fidgetted. 'I should start fresh, and be out of the way of the Andersons,' he said. 'That Anderson junior, is a horrid fellow—he spites Norman, and he bullied me, till I was big enough to show him that it would not do—and though I am so much younger, he is afraid of me. He makes up to me, and tries to get me into all the mischief that is going.'

'And you know that, and let him lead you? Oh, Harry!'

'I don't let him lead me,' said Harry, indignantly, 'but I won't have them say I *can't* do things.'

Margaret laughed, and Harry presently perceived what she meant, but instead of answering, he began to boast, 'There never was a May in disgrace yet, and there never shall be.'

'That is a thing to be very thankful for,' said Margaret, 'but you know there may be much harm without public disgrace. I never heard of one of the Anderson's being in disgrace yet.'

'No—shabby fellows, that just manage to keep fair with old Hoxton, and make a show,' said Harry. 'They look at translations, and copy old stock verses. O, it was such fun the other day. What do you think? Norman must have been dreaming, for he had taken to school, by mistake, Richard's old Gradus that Ethel uses, and there were ever so many rough copies of hers sticking in it.'

'Poor Ethel! What consternation she would be in! I hope no one found it out.'

'Why, Anderson junior, was gaping about in despair for sense for his verses—he comes on that, and slyly copies a whole set of her old ones, done when she—Norman I mean—was in the fifth form. His subject was a river, and hers Babylon; but, altering a line or two, it did just as well. He never guessed I saw him, and thought he had done it famously. He showed them up, and would have got some noted good mark, but that, by great good luck, Ethel had made two of her pentameters too short, which he hadn't the wit to find out, thinking all Norman did must be right. So he has shown up a girl's verses—isn't that rare?' cried Harry, dancing on his chair with triumph.

'I hope no one knows they were hers?'

'Bless you, no!' said Harry, who regarded Ethel's attainments as something contraband. 'D'ye think I could tell? No, that's the only pity, that he can't hear it; but, after all, I don't care for anything he does, now I know he has shown up a girl's verses.'

‘Are these verses of poor Ethel’s safe at home?’

‘Yes, I took care of that. Mind you don’t tell anyone, Margaret; I never told even Norman.’

‘But all your school-fellows arn’t like these? You have Hector Ernescliffe.’

‘He’s a nice fellow enough, but he is little, and down in the school. ’Twould be making a fourth form of myself to be after him. The fact is, Margaret, they are a low, ungentlemanly lot just now, about sixth and upper fifth form,’ said Harry, lowering his voice into an anxious confidential tone; ‘and since Norman has been less amongst them, they’ve got worse; and you see, now home is different, and he isn’t like what he was, I’m thrown on them, and I want to get out of it. I didn’t know that was it before, but Richard showed me what set me on thinking of it, and I see she knew all about it.’

‘That she did! There is a great deal in what you say, Harry, but you know she thought nothing would be of real use but changing within. If you don’t get a root of strength in yourself, your ship will be no better to you than school—there will be idle midshipmen as well as idle school boys.’

‘Yes I know,’ said Harry; ‘but do you think papa will consent? She would not have minded.’

‘I can’t tell. I should think he would; but if any scheme is to come to good, it must begin by your telling him of the going out shooting.’

Harry sighed. ‘I’d have done it long ago if she was here,’ he said. ‘I never did anything so bad before without telling, and I don’t like it at all. It seems to come between him and me when I wish him good night.’

‘Then, Harry, pray do tell him. You’ll have no comfort if you don’t.’

‘I know I shan’t; but then he’ll be so angry! And, do you know, Margaret, ’twas worse than I told you, for a covey of partridges got up, and unluckily I had got the gun, and I fired and killed one, and that was regular poaching, you know! And when we heard some one coming, how we did cut! Ax—the other fellow, I mean, got it, and cooked it in his bed-room, and ate it for supper; and he laughs about it, but I have felt so horrid all the week! Suppose a keeper had got a summons!’

‘I can only say again, the only peace will be in telling him.’

‘Yes; but he will be so angry. When that lot of fellows a year or two ago, did something like it, and shot some of the Abbotstoke rabbits, don’t you remember how much he said about its being disgraceful, and ordering us never to have anything to do with their gunnery? And he will think it so very bad to have gone out on a lark just now! O, I wish I hadn’t done it.’

‘So do I, indeed, Harry! but I am sure, even if he should be angry at first, he will be pleased with your confessing.’

Harry looked very reluctant and disconsolate, and his sister did not wonder—for Dr. May's way of hearing of a fault was never to be calculated on. 'Come, Harry,' said she, 'if he is ever so angry, though I don't think he will be, do you think that will be half as bad as this load at your heart? Besides, if you are not bold enough to speak to him, do you think you can ever be brave enough for a sailor?'

'I will,' said Harry, and the words were hardly spoken, before his father's hand was on the door. He was taken by surprise at the moment of trial coming so speedily, and had half a mind to retreat by the other door; he was stayed by the reflection that Margaret would think him a coward, unfit for a sailor, and he made up his mind to endure whatever might betide.

'Harry here? This is company I did not expect.'

'Harry has something to say to you, papa.'

'Eh! my boy, what is it?' said he, kindly.

'Papa, I have killed a partridge. Two fellows got me to hire a gun, and go out shooting with them last Saturday,' said Harry, speaking firmly and boldly now he had once begun. 'We meant only to go after pee-wits, but a partridge got up, and I killed it.'

Then came a pause. Harry stopped, and Dr. May waited, half expecting to hear that the boy was only brought to confession, by finding himself in a scrape. Margaret spoke. 'And he could not be happy till he had told you.'

'Is it so? Is that the whole?' said the Doctor, looking at his son with a keen glance, between affection and inquiry, as if only waiting to be sure the confession was free, before he gave his free forgiveness.

'Yes, papa,' said Harry, his voice and lip losing their firmness, as the sweetness of expression gained the day on his father's face. 'Only that I know—'twas very wrong—especially now—and I am very sorry—and I beg your pardon.'

The latter words came between sighs, fast becoming sobs, in spite of Harry's attempts to control them, as his father held out his arm, and drew him close to him. 'That's mamma's own brave boy,' he said in his ear—in a voice which strong feeling had reduced to such a whisper, that even Margaret could not hear—she only saw how Harry, sobbing aloud, clung tighter and tighter to him, till he said, 'Take care of my arm!' and Harry sprung back at least a yard, with such a look of dismay, that the Doctor laughed. 'No harm done!' said he. 'I was only a little in dread of such a young lion! Come back, Harry,' and he took his hand. 'It was a bad piece of work, and it will never do for you to let yourself be drawn into every bit of mischief that is on foot; I believe I ought to give you a good lecture on it, but I can't do it, after such a straightforward confession. You must have gone through enough in the last week, not to be likely to do it again.'

‘Yes, papa—thank you.’

‘I suppose I must not ask you any questions about it, for fear of betraying the fellows,’ said Dr. May, half smiling.

‘Thank you, papa,’ said Harry, infinitely relieved and grateful, and quite content for some space to lean in silence against the chair, with that encircling arm round him, while some talk passed between his father and Margaret.

What a world of thought passed through the boy’s young soul in that space! First, there was a thrill of intense, burning love to his father, scarcely less fondness to his sweet motherly sister; a clinging feeling to every chair and table of that room, which seemed still full of his mother’s presence; a numbering over of all the others with ardent attachment, and a flinging from him with horror the notion of asking to be far away from that dearest father, that loving home, that arm that was round him. Anything rather than be without them in the dreary world! But then came the remembrance of cherished visions, the shame of relinquishing a settled purpose, the thought of weary morrows, with the tempters among his playmates, and his home blank and melancholy; and the roaming spirit of enterprise stirred again, and reproached him with being a baby, for fancying he could stay at home for ever. He would come back again with such honours as Alan Ernescliffe had brought, and oh! if his father so prized them in a stranger, what would it be in his own son? Come home to such a greeting as would make up for the parting! Harry’s heart throbbed again for the boundless sea, the tall ship, and the wondrous foreign climes, where he had so often lived in fancy. Should he, could he speak; was this the moment? and he stood gazing at the fire, oppressed with the weighty reality of deciding his destiny. At last Dr. May looked in his face, ‘Well, what now, boy? You have your head full of something—what’s coming next?’

Out it came, ‘Papa, will you let me be a sailor?’

‘Oh!’ said Dr. May, ‘that is come on again, is it? I thought that you had forgotten all that.’

‘No, Papa,’ said Harry, with the manly coolness that the sense of his determination gave him—‘it was not a mere fancy, and I have never had it out of my head. I mean it quite in earnest—I had rather be a sailor. I don’t wish to get away from Latin and Greek, I don’t mind them; but I think I could be a better sailor than anything. I know it is not all play, but I am willing to rough it; and I am getting so old, it is time to see about it, so will you consent to it, papa?’

‘Well! there’s some sense in your way of putting it,’ said Dr. May. ‘You have it strong in your head then, and you know ’tis not all fair weather work!’

‘That I do; Alan told me histories, and I’ve read all about it; but one must rough it anywhere, and if I am ever so far away, I’ll

try not to forget what's right. I'll do my duty, and not care for danger.'

'Well said, my man; but remember 'tis easier talking by one's own fire-side, than doing when the trial comes.'

'And will you let me, papa?'

'I'll think about it. I can't make up my mind as "quick as directly," you know, Harry,' said his father, smiling kindly, 'but I won't treat it as a boy's fancy, for you've spoken in a manly way, and deserve to be attended to.' 'Now run down, and tell the girls to put away their work, for I shall come down in a minute to read prayers.'

Harry went, and his father sighed and mused! 'That's a fine fellow! So this is what comes of bringing sick sailors home—one's own boys must be catching the infection. Little monkey, he talks as wisely as if he were forty! He is really set on it, do you think, Margaret? I'm afraid so!'

'I think so,' said Margaret; 'I don't think he ever has it out of his mind!'

'And when the roving spirit once lays hold of a lad, he must have his way—he is good for nothing else,' said Dr. May.

'I suppose a man may keep from evil in that profession, as well as in any other,' said Margaret.

'Aha! you are bit too, are you?' said the Doctor; 'tis the husbandman and viper, is it? Then his smile turned into a heavy sigh, as he saw he had brought colour to Margaret's pale cheek, but she answered calmly, 'Dear mamma did not think it would be a bad thing for him.'

'I know,' said the Doctor, pausing; 'but it never came to this with her.'

'I wish he had chosen something else; but'—and Margaret thought it right to lay before her father some part of what he had said of the temptations of the school at Stoneborough. The Doctor listened and considered; at last he rose, and said, 'Well, I'll set Ritchie to write to Ernescliffe, and hear what he says. What must be, must be. 'Tis only asking me to give up the boy, that's all;' and as he left the room, his daughter again heard his sigh and half-uttered words, 'O Maggie, Maggie!'

CHAPTER X.

'A tale
Would rouse adventurous courage in a boy,
And make him long to be a mariner,
That he might rove the main.'

SOUTHEY.

ETHELDRED had the satisfaction of seeing the Taylors at school on Sunday, but no Halls made their appearance, and, on inquiry, she

was told, Please ma'am, they said they would not come, so Ethel condemned Granny Hall as 'a horrid, vile, false, hypocritical old creature! It was no use having any thing more to do with her.'

'Very well,' said Richard; 'then I need not speak to my father'

'Ritchie now! you know I meant no such thing!'

'You know, it is just what will happen continually.'

'Of course there will be failures, but this is so abominable, when they had those nice frocks, and those two beautiful eighteen-penny shawls! There are three shillings out of my pound thrown away!'

'Perhaps there was some reason to prevent them. We will go and see.'

'We shall only hear some more palavering. I want to have no more to say to—' but here Ethel caught herself up, and began to perceive what a happiness it was that she had not the power of acting on her own impulses.

'The twins and their little brother of two years old were Christened in the afternoon, and Flora invited the parents to drink tea in the kitchen, and visit Lucy, while Ethel and Mary each carried a baby up-stairs to exhibit to Margaret.

Richard, in the meantime, had a conversation with John Taylor, and learnt a good deal about the district, and the number of the people. At tea, he began to rehearse his information, and the Doctor listened with interest, which put Ethel in happy agitation, believing that the moment was come, and Richard seemed to be only waiting for the conclusion of a long tirade against those who ought to do something for the place, when behold! Blanche was climbing on her father's knee, begging for one of his Sunday stories.

Etheldred was cruelly disappointed, and could not at first rejoice to see her father able again to occupy himself with his little girl. The narration, in his low tones, roused her from her mood of vexation. It was the story of David, which he told in language scriptural and poetical, so pretty and tender in its simplicity, that she could not choose but attend. Ever and anon there was a glance towards Harry, as if he were secretly likening his own 'yellow haired laddie' to the 'shepherd boy, ruddy, and of a fair countenance.'

'So Tom and Blanche,' he concluded, 'can you tell me how we may be like the shepherd-boy, David?'

'There arn't giants now,' said Tom.

'Wrong is a giant,' said his little sister.

'Right, my white May-flower, and what then?'

'We are to fight,' said Tom.

'Yes, and mind, the giant with all his armour may be some great thing we have to do: but what did David begin with when he was younger?'

'The lion and the bear.'

'Aye, and minding his sheep. Perhaps little things, now you are little children, may be like the lion and the bear—so kill them

off—get rid of them—cure yourself of whining or dawdling, or whatever it be, and mind your sheep well,' said he, smiling sweetly in answer to the children's earnest looks as they caught his meaning, and if you do, you will not find it near so hard to deal with your great giant struggle when it comes.'

Ah! thought Ethel, it suits me as well as the children. I have a great giant on Cocksmoor, and here I am, not allowed to attack him, because, perhaps, I am not minding my sheep, and letting my lion and my bear run loose about the house.

She was less impatient this week, partly from the sense of being on probation, and partly because she, in common with all the rest, was much engrossed with Harry's fate. He came home every day at dinner-time with Norman to ask if Alan Ernescliffe's letter had come; and at length Mary and Tom met them open-mouthed with the news that Margaret had it in her room.

Thither they hastened. Margaret held it out with a smile of congratulation. 'Here it is, Harry; papa said you were to have it, and consider it well, and let him know, when you had taken time. You must do it soberly. It is once for all.'

Harry's impetuosity was checked, and he took the letter quietly. His sister put her hand on his shoulder, 'Would you mind my kissing you, dear Harry?' and as he threw his arms round her neck, she whispered. 'Pray that you may choose right.'

He went quietly away, and Norman begged to know what had been Alan Ernescliffe's advice.

'I can scarcely say he gave any direct advice,' said Margaret; 'he would not have thought that called for. He said, no doubt there were hardships and temptations, more or less, according to circumstances; but, weighing one thing with another, he thought it gave as fair a chance of happiness as other professions, and the discipline and regularity had been very good for himself, as well as for many others he had known. He said, when a man is willing to go wrong there is much to help him, but when he is resolved on doing right, he need not be prevented.'

'That is what you may say of anything,' said Norman.

'Just so; and it answered papa's question, whether it was exposing Harry to more temptation than he must meet with anywhere. That was the reason it was such a comfort to have any one to write to, who understands it so well.'

'Yes, and knows Harry's nature.'

'He said he had been fortunate in his captains, and had led, on the whole, a happy life at sea; and he thought if it was so with him, Harry was likely to enjoy it more, being of a hardy adventurous nature, and a sailor from choice, not from circumstances.'

'Then he advised for it? I did not think he would; you know he will not let Hector be a sailor.'

'He told me he thought only a strong natural bent that way

made it desirable, and that he believed Hector only wished it from imitation of him. He said too, long ago, that he thought Harry cut out for a sailor.'

'A spirited fellow!' said Norman, with a look of saddened pride and approval, not at all like one so near the same age. 'He is up to anything, afraid of nothing, he can lick any boy in the school already. It will be worse than ever without him!'

'Yes, you will miss your constant follower. He has been your shadow ever since he could walk. But there's the clock, I must not keep you any longer; good-bye, Norman.'

Harry gave his brother the letter as soon as they were outside the house, and while he read it, took his arm and guided him. 'Well,' said Norman as he finished.

'It is all right,' said Harry; and the two brothers said no more; there was something rising up in their throats at the thought that they had very few more walks to take together to Bishop Whichcote's school; Norman's heart was very full at the prospect of another vacancy in his home, and Harry's was swelling between the ardour of enterprise and the thought of bidding good-bye to each familiar object, and, above all, to the brother who had been his model and admiration from babyhood.

'June!' at length he broke out, 'I wish you were going too. I should not mind it half so much if you were.'

'Nonsense, Harry! you want to be July after June all your life, do you? You'll be much more of a man without me.'

That evening Dr. May called Harry into his study to ask him if his mind was made up; he put the subject fairly before him, and told him not to be deterred from choosing what he thought would be for the best by any scruples about changing his mind. 'We shall not think a bit the worse of you; better now than too late.'

There was that in his face and tone that caused Harry to say, in a stifled voice, 'I did not think you would care so much, papa; I won't go, if you do.'

Dr. May put his hand on his shoulder, and was silent. Harry felt a strange mixture of hope and fear, joy and grief, disappointment and relief. 'You must not give it up on that account, my dear,' he said at length; 'I should not let you see this, if it did not happen at a time when I can't command myself as I ought. If you were an only son, it might be your duty to stay; being one of many, 'tis nonsense to make a rout about parting with you. If it is better for you, it is better for all of us; and we shall do very well when you are once fairly gone. Don't let *that* influence you for a moment.'

Harry paused, not that he doubted, but he was collecting his energies—'Then, papa, I choose the Navy.'

'Then it is done, Harry. You have chosen in a dutiful unselfish spirit, and I trust it will prosper with you; for I am sure your father's blessing—aye, and your mother's, too, go with you! Now

then,' after a pause, 'go and call Richard. I want him to write to Ernescliffe about that naval school. You must take your leave of the Whicheote foundation on Friday. I shall go and give Dr. Hoxton notice to-morrow, and get Tom's name down instead.'

And when the name of Thomas May was set down, Dr. Hoxton expressed his trust that it would pass through the school as free from the slightest blemish as those of Richard, Norman, and Harry May.

Now that Harry's destiny was fixed, Ethel began to think of Cocks Moor again, and she accomplished another walk there with Richard, Flora, and Mary, to question Granny Hall about the children's failure.

The old woman's reply was a tissue of contradictions: the girls were idle hussies, all *contrary*; they plagued the very life out of her, and she represented herself as using the most frightful threats, if they would not go to school. Breaking every bone in their skin was the least injury she promised them; till Mary, beginning to think her a cruel old woman, took hold of her brother's coat-tails for protection.

'But I am afraid, Mrs. Hall,' said Richard, in that tone which might be either ironical or simple, 'if you served them so, they would never be able to get to school at all, poor things.'

'Bless you, Sir, d'ye think I'd ever lay a finger near them; it's only the way one must talk to children, you see,' said she, patronizing his inexperience.

'Perhaps they have found that out,' said Richard.

Granny looked much entertained, and laughed triumphantly and shrewdly, 'aye, aye, that they have, the lasses—they be sharp enough for anything, *that* they be. Why, when I tell little Jenny that there's the black man coming after her, what does she do but she ups and says, 'Granny, I know 'tis only the wind in the chimney.'

'Then I don't think it seems to answer,' said Richard. 'Just suppose you were to try for once, really punishing them when they won't obey you, perhaps they would do it next time.'

'Why, Sir, you see I don't like to take the stick to them; they've got no mother, you see, Sir.'

Mary thought her a kind grandmother, and came out from behind her brother.

'I think it would be kind to do it for once. What do you think they will do as they grow older, if you don't keep them in order when they are little?'

This was foresight beyond Granny Hall, who began to expatiate on the troubles she had undergone in their service, and the excellence of Sam. There was certainly a charm in her manners, for Ethel forgot her charge of ingratitude, the other sisters were perfectly taken with her, nor could they any of them help giving credence to her asseverations that Jenny and Polly should come to school next Sunday.

They soon formed another acquaintance; a sharp-faced woman stood in their path, with a little girl in her hand, and arrested them

with a low curtsy, and not a very pleasant voice, addressing herself to Flora, who was quite as tall as Richard, and appeared the person of most consequence.

‘If you please, Miss, I wanted to speak to you. I have got a little girl here, and I want to send her to school, only I have no shoes for her.’

‘Why, surely, if she can run about here on the heath, she can go to school,’ said Flora.

‘Oh! but there is all the other children to point at her. The poor thing would be daunted, you see, Miss; if I could but get some friend to give her a pair of shoes, I’d send her in a minute. I want her to get some learning; as I am always saying, I’d never keep her away, if I had but got the clothes to send her in. I never lets her be running on the common like them Halls, as it’s a shame to see them in nice frocks, as Mrs. Hall got by going hypercriting about.’

‘What is your name?’ said Richard, cutting her short.

‘Watts, if you please, Sir; we heard there was good work up here, Sir, and so we came; but I’d never have set foot in it if I had known what a dark heathenish place it is, with never a Gospel minister to come near it,’ and a great deal more to the same purpose.

Mary whispered to Flora something about having out-grown her boots, but Flora silenced her by a squeeze of the hand, and the two friends of Cocksmeer felt a good deal puzzled.

At last Flora said, ‘You will soon get her clothed if she comes regularly to school on Sundays, for she will be admitted into the club; I will recommend her if she has a good character and comes regularly. Good morning, Mrs. Watts. Now we must go, or it will be dark before we get home. And they walked hastily away.

‘Horrid woman!’ was Ethel’s exclamation.

‘But, Flora,’ said innocent Mary, ‘why would you not let me give the little girl my boots?’

‘Perhaps I may, if she is good and comes to school,’ said Flora.

‘I think Margaret ought to settle what you do with your boots,’ said Richard, not much to Flora’s satisfaction.

‘It is all the same,’ she said. ‘If I approve, Margaret will not object.’

‘How well you helped us out, Flora,’ said Ethel; ‘I did not know in the least what to say.’

‘It will be the best way of testing her sincerity,’ said Flora, ‘and at least it will do the child good; but I congratulate you on the promising aspect of Cocksmeer.’

‘We did not expect to find a perfect place,’ said Ethel; ‘if it were, it would be of no use to go to it.’

Ethel could answer with dignity, but her heart sunk at the aspect of what she had undertaken. She knew there would be evil, but she had expected it in a more striking and less disagreeable form.

That walk certainly made her less impatient, though it did not relax her determination, nor the guard over her lion and bear, which her own good feeling, aided by Margaret's counsel, showed her were the greatest hindrances to her doing anything good and great.

Though she was obliged to set to work so many principles and reflections to induce herself to wipe a pen, or to sit straight on her chair, that it was like winding up a steam-engine to thread a needle; yet the work *was* being done—she was struggling with her faults, humbled by them, watching them, and overcoming them.

Flora, meanwhile, was sitting calmly down in the contemplation of the unexpected services she had rendered, confident that her character for energy and excellence was established, believing it herself, and looking back on her childish vanity and love of domineering as long past and conquered. She thought her grown-up character had begun, and was too secure to examine it closely.

CHAPTER XI.

*One thing is wanting in the beamy cup
Of my young life! one thing to be poured in;
Aye, and one thing is wanting to fill up
The measure of proud joy, and make it sin.'

F. W. F.

HOPES that Dr. May would ever have his mind free, seemed as fallacious as mamma's old promise to Margaret, to make dolls' clothes for her whenever there should be no live dolls to be worked for in the nursery.

Richard and Ethel themselves had their thoughts otherwise engrossed. The last week before the holidays was an important one. There was an examination, by which the standing of the boys in the school was determined, and this time it was of more than ordinary importance, as the Randall scholarship of £100 a year for three years would be open in the summer to the competition of the first six boys. Richard had never come within six of the top, but had been past at every examination by younger boys, till his father could bear it no longer; and now Norman was too young to be likely to have much chance of being of the number. There were eight decidedly his seniors, and Harvey Anderson, a small, quick-witted boy, half a year older, who had entered school at the same time, and had always been one step below him, had, in the last three months, gained fast upon him.

Harry, however, meant Norman to be one of the six, and declared all the fellows thought he would be, except Anderson's party. Mr. Wilmot, in a call on Ethel and Flora, told them that he thought their brother had a fair chance, but he feared he was overworking

himself, and should tell the Doctor so, whenever he could catch him; but this was difficult, as there was a great deal of illness just then, and he was less at home than usual.

All this excited the home party, but Norman only seemed annoyed by talk about it, and though always with a book in his hand, was so dreamy and listless, that Flora declared there was no fear of his doing too much—she thought he would fail for want of trying.

‘I mean to try,’ said Norman; ‘say no more about it, pray.’

The great day was the 20th of December, and Ethel ran out, as the boys went to school, to judge of Norman’s looks, which were not promising. ‘No wonder,’ said Harry, since he had stayed up doing Euripides and Cicero the whole length of a candle that had been new at bed-time. ‘But never mind, Ethel, if he only beats Anderson, I don’t care for anything else.’

‘O, it will be unbearable if he does not! Do try, Norman, dear.’

‘Never you mind.’

‘He’ll light up at the last moment,’ said Ethel, consolingly, to Harry; but she was very uneasy herself, for she had set her heart on his surpassing Harvey Anderson. No more was heard all day. Tom went at dinner-time to see if he could pick up any news; but he was shy, or was too late, and gained no intelligence. Dr. May and Richard talked of going to hear the speeches and *vivâ voce* examination in the afternoon—objects of great interest to all Stoneborough men—but just as they came home from a long day’s work, Dr. May was summoned to the next town, by an electric telegraph, and, as it was to a bad case, he did not expect to be at home till the mail-train came in at one o’clock at night. Richard begged to go with him, and he consented, unwillingly, to please Margaret, who could not bear to think of his ‘fending for himself’ in the dark on the rail-road.

Very long did the evening seem to the listening sisters. Eight, and no tidings; nine, the boys not come; Tom obliged to go to bed by sheer sleepiness, and Ethel unable to sit still, and causing Flora demurely to wonder at her fidgetting so much, it would be so much better to fix her attention to some employment; while Margaret owned that Flora was right, but watched, and started at each sound, almost as anxiously as Ethel.

It was ten, when there was a sharp pull at the bell, and down flew the sisters; but old James was beforehand, and Harry was exclaiming, ‘Dux! James, he is Dux! Hurrah! Flossy, Ethel, Mary! There stands the Dux of Stoneborough! Where’s papa?’

‘Sent for to Whitford. But oh! Norman, Dux! Is he really?’

‘To be sure, but I must tell Margaret;’ and up he rushed, shouted the news to her, but could not stay for congratulation; broke Tom’s slumber by roaring it in his ear, and dashed into the nursery, where nurse for once forgave him for waking the baby

Norman, meanwhile, followed his eager sisters into the drawing-room, putting up his hand as if the light dazzled him, and looking, by no means, as if he had just achieved triumphant success.

Ethel paused in her exultation: 'But is it, is it true, Norman?'

'Yes,' he said, wearily, making his way to his dark corner.

'But what was it for? How is it?'

'I don't know,' he answered.

'What's the matter?' said Flora. 'Are you tired, Norman, dear; does your head ache?'

'Yes; and the pain was evidently severe.

'Won't you come to Margaret?' said Ethel, knowing what was the greater suffering; but he did not move, and they forbore to torment him with questions. The next moment Harry came down in an ecstasy, bringing in, from the hall, Norman's beautiful prize-books, and showing off their Latin inscription.

'Ah!' said he, looking at his brother, 'he is regularly done for. He ought to turn in at once. That Everard is a famous fellow for an examiner. He said he never had seen such a copy of verses sent up by a school-boy, and could hardly believe June was barely sixteen. Old Hoxton says he is the youngest Dux they have had these fifty years that he has known the school, and Mr. Wilmot said 'twas the most creditable examination he had ever known, and that I might tell papa so. What did possess that ridiculous old land-lubber at Whitford, to go and get on the sick-list on this, of all the nights of the year? June, how can you go on sitting there, when you know you ought to be in your berth?'

'I wish he was,' said Flora, 'but let him have some tea first.'

'And tell us more, Harry,' said Ethel. 'Oh! it is famous! I knew he would come right at last. It is too delightful, if papa was but here!'

'Isn't it? You should have seen how Anderson grinned—he is only fourth—down below Forder, and Cheviot, and Ashe.'

'Well, I did not think Norman would have been before Forder and Cheviot. That is grand.'

'It was the verses that did it,' said Harry; they had an hour to do Themistocles on the hearth of Admetus, and there he beat them all to shivers. 'Twas all done smack, smooth, without a scratch, in Aleaics, and Cheviot heard Wilmot saying, 'twas no mere task, but had poetry, and all that sort of thing in it. But I don't know whether that would have done, if he had not come out so strong in the recitation; they put him on in Priam's speech to Achilles, and he said it—Oh! 'twas too bad papa did not hear him! Every one held their breath and listened.'

'How you do go on!' muttered Norman; but no one heeded, and Harry continued: 'He construed a chorus in Sophocles without a blunder; but what did the business was this, I believe. They asked all manner of out-of-the-way questions—history and geogra-

phy, what no one expected, and the fellows who read nothing they can help, were thoroughly posed. Forder had not a word to say, and the others were worse, for Cheviot thought Queen Elizabeth's Earl of Leicester was Simon de Montfort; and didn't know when that battle was, beginning with an E.—was it Evesham, or Edgehill ?'

'O Harry, you are as bad yourself?'

'But anyone would know Leicester, because of Kenilworth,' said Harry; 'and I'm not sixth form. If papa had but been there! Everyone was asking for him, and wishing it. For Dr. Hoxton called me—they shook hands with me, and wished me joy of it, and told me to tell my father how well Norman had done.'

'I suppose you looked so happily, they could not help it,' said Flora, smiling at that honest beaming face of joy.

'Aye,' said Norman, looking up; 'they had something to say to him on his own score, which he has forgotten.'

'I should think not,' said Harry. 'Why, what d'ye think they said? That I had gone on as well as all the Mays, and they trusted I should still, and be a credit to my profession.'

'Oh! Harry! why didn't you tell us? Oh! that is grand!' and, as the two elder girls made this exclamation, Mary proceeded to a rapturous embrace. 'Get along, Mary, you are throttling one. Mr. Everard enquired for my father and Margaret, and said he'd call to-morrow, and Hoxton and Wilmot kept on wishing he was there.'

'I wish he had been!' said Ethel; 'he would have taken such delight in it; but, even if he could have gone, he doubted whether it would not have made Norman get on worse from anxiety.'

'Well, Cheviot wanted me to send up for him at dinner-time,' said Harry; 'for as soon as we sat down in the hall, June turned off giddy, and could not stay, and looked so horrid, we thought it was all over with him, and he would not be able to go up at all.'

'And Cheviot thought you ought to send for papa!'

'Yes, I knew he would not be in, and so we left him lying down on the bench in the cloister till dinner was over.'

'What a place for catching cold!' said Flora.

'So Cheviot said, but I couldn't help it; and when we went to call him afterwards, he was all right. Wasn't it fun, when the names were called over, and May senior, at the head! I don't think it will be better when I am a post-captain myself! But Margaret has not heard half yet.'

After telling it once in her room, once in the nursery, in whispers like gusts of wind, and once in the pantry, Harry employed himself in writing—'Norman is Dux!' in immense letters, on pieces of paper, which he disposed all over the house, to meet the eyes of his father and Richard on their return.

Ethel's joy was sadly damped by Norman's manner. He hardly

spoke—only just came in to wish Margaret good-night, and shrank from her affectionate sayings, departing abruptly to his own room.

‘Poor fellow! he is sadly overdone,’ said she, as he went.

‘Oh!’ sighed Ethel, nearly ready to cry, ‘’tis not like what I used to fancy it would be when he came to the head of the school!’

‘It will be different to-morrow,’ said Margaret, trying to console herself as well as Ethel. ‘Think how he has been on the strain this whole day, and long before, doing so much more than older boys. No wonder he is tired and worn out.’

Ethel did not understand what mental fatigue was, for her active, vigorous spirit had never been tasked beyond its powers.

‘I hope he will be like himself to-morrow!’ said she, disconsolately. ‘I never saw him rough and hasty before. It was even with you, Margaret.’

‘No, no, Ethel, you arn’t going to blame your own Norman for unkindness on this of all days in the year. You know how it was; you love him better; just as I do, for not being able to bear to stay in this room, where—’

‘Yes,’ said Ethel, mournfully; ‘it was a great shame of me! How could I? Dear Norman! how he does grieve—what love his must have been! But yet, Margaret,’ she said, impatiently, and the hot tears breaking out, ‘I cannot—cannot bear it! To have him not caring one bit for all of us! I want him to triumph! I can’t without him!’

‘What, Ethel, you, who said you didn’t care for mere distinction and praise? Don’t you think dear mamma would say it was safer for him not to be delighted and triumphant?’

‘It is very tiresome,’ said Ethel, nearly convinced, but in a slightly petulant voice.

‘And does not one love those two dear boys to-night!’ said Margaret. ‘Norman, not able to rejoice in his victory without her, and Harry in such an ecstasy with Norman’s honours. I don’t think I ever was so fond of my two brothers.’

Ethel smiled, and drew up her head, and said no boys were like them anywhere, and papa would be delighted, and so went to bed happier in her exultation, and in hoping that the holidays would make Norman himself again.

Nothing could be better news for Dr. May, who had never lost a grain of the ancient school-party-loyalty that is part of the nature of the English gentleman. He was a thorough Stoneborough boy, had followed the politics of the Whicheote foundation year by year all his life, and perhaps, in his heart, regarded no honour as more to be prized than that of Dux and Randall scholar. Harry was in his room the next morning as soon as ever he was stirring, a welcome guest—teased a little at first, by his pretending to take it all as a sailor’s prank to hoax him and Richard, and then free to

pour out to delighted ears the whole history of the examination, and of everyone's congratulations.

Norman himself was asleep when Harry went to give this narration. He came down late, and his father rose to meet him as he entered. 'My boy,' he said, 'I had not expected this of you. Well done, Norman!' and the whole tone and gesture had a heartfelt approval and joy in them, that Ethel knew her brother was deeply thrilled by, for his colour deepened, and his lips quivered into something like a smile, though he did not lift his eyes.

Then came Richard's warm greeting and congratulation, and, too, showing himself as delighted as if the honours were his own; and then Dr. May again, in lively tones, like old times, laughing at Norman for sleeping late, and still not looking well awake, asking him if he was quite sure it was not all a dream.

'Well,' said Norman, 'I should think it was, if it were not that you all believe it.'

'Harry had better go to sleep next,' said Dr. May, 'and see what dreaming will make him. If it makes Dux of Norman, who knows but it may make Drakes of him? Ha! Ethel—'

'O, give us for our Kings such Queens,
And for our Ducks such Drakes.'

There had not been such a merry breakfast for months. There was the old confusion of voices; the boys, Richard, and the Doctor had much to talk over of the schooldoings of this week, and there was nearly as much laughing as in days past. Ethel wondered whether anyone but herself observed that the voice most seldom heard was Norman's.

The promised call was made by Dr. Hoxton, and Mr. Everard, an old friend, and after their departure Dr. May came to Margaret's room with fresh accounts, corroborating what Harry had said of the clear knowledge and brilliant talent that Norman had displayed, to a degree that surprised his masters, almost as much as the examiners. The copy of verses Dr. May brought with him, and construed them to Margaret, commenting all the way on their ease, and the fulness of thought, certainly remarkable in a boy of sixteen.

They were then resigned to Ethel's keeping, and she could not help imparting her admiration to their author, with some apology for vexing him again.

'I don't want to be cross,' said Norman, whom these words roused to a sense that he had been churlish last night; 'but I cannot help it. I wish people would not make such a fuss about it.'

'I don't think you can be well, Norman.'

'Nonsense. There's nothing the matter with me.'

'But I don't understand your not caring at all, and not being the least pleased.'

'It only makes it worse,' said Norman; 'I only feel as if I wanted

to be out of the way. My only comfortable time yesterday was on that bench in the cool quiet cloister. I don't think I could have got through without that, when they left me in peace, till Cheviot and Harry came to rout me up, and I knew it was all coming.'

'Ah! you have overworked yourself, but it was for something. You have given papa such pleasure and comfort, as you can't help being glad of. That is very different from us foolish young ones and our trumpeting.'

'What comfort can it be? I've not been the smallest use all this time. When he was ill, I left him to Ernescliffe, and lay on the floor like an ass; and if he were to ask me to touch his arm, I should be as bad again. A fine thing for me to have talked all that arrogant stuff about Richard! I hate the thought of it; and, as if to make arrows and barbs of it, here's Richard making as much of this as if it was a double first class! He afraid to be compared with me, indeed!'

'Norman, indeed, this is going too far. We can't be as useful as the elder ones; and when you know how papa was vexed about Richard, you must be glad to have pleased him.'

'If I were he, it would only make me miss her more. I believe he only makes much of me that he may not disappoint me.'

'I don't think so. He is really glad, and the more because she would have been so pleased. He said it would have been a happy day for her, and there was more of the glad look than the sorry one. It was the glistening look that comes when he is watching baby, or hearing Margaret say pretty things to her. You *see* it is the first bright morning we have had.'

'Yes,' said Norman; 'perhaps it was, but I don't know. I thought half of it was din.'

'Oh Norman!'

'And another thing, Ethel, I don't feel as if I had fairly earned it. Forder or Cheviot ought to have had it. They are both more really good scholars than I am, and have always been above me. There was nothing I really knew better, except those historical questions that no one reckoned on; and not living at home with their sisters and books, they had no such chance, and it is very hard on them, and I don't like it.'

'Well, but you really and truly beat them in everything.'

'Aye, by chance. There were lots of places in construing, where I should have broken down if I had happened to be set on in them; it was only a wonder I did not in that chorus, for I had only looked at it twice; but Everard asked me nothing but what I knew; and now and then I get into a funny state, when nothing is too hard for me, and that was how it was yesterday evening. Generally, I feel as dull as a post,' said Norman, yawning and stretching; 'I could not make a nonsense hexameter this minute, if I was to die for it.'

'A sort of Berserker fury!' said Ethel, 'like that night you did

the coral-worm verses. It's very odd. Are you sure you are well dear Norman ?'

To which he answered, with displeasure, that he was as well as possible, ordered her not to go and make any more fuss, and left her hastily. She was unhappy, and far from satisfied; she had never known his temper so much affected, and was much puzzled; but she was too much afraid of vexing him, to impart her perplexity even to Margaret. However, the next day, Sunday, as she was reading to Margaret after Church, her father came in, and the first thing he said was, 'I want to know what you think of Norman.'

'How do you mean?' said Margaret; 'in health or spirits?'

'Both,' said Dr. May. 'Poor boy! he has never held up his head since October, and, at his age, that is hardly natural. He goes moping about, has lost flesh and appetite, and looks altogether out of order, shooting up like a May-pole too.'

'Mind and body,' said Margaret, while Ethel gazed intently at her father, wondering whether she ought to speak, for Margaret did not know half what she did; nothing about the bad nights, nor what he called the 'funny state.'

'Yes, both. I fancied it was only his rapid growth, and the excitement of this examination, and that it would go off, but I think there's more amiss. He was lounging about doing nothing, when the girls were gone to school after dinner, and I asked him to walk down with me to the Almshouses. He did not seem very willing, but he went, and presently, as I had hold of his arm, I felt him shivering, and saw him turn as pale as a sheet. As soon as I noticed it, he flushed crimson, and would not hear of turning back, stoutly protesting he was quite well, but I saw his hand quivering even when I got into Church. Why, Ethel, you have turned as red as he did.'

'Then he has done it!' exclaimed Ethel, in a smothered voice.

'What do you mean? Speak, Ethel.'

'He has gone past it—the place,' whispered she.

The Doctor made a sound of sorrowful assent, as if much struck; then said, 'You don't mean he has never been there since?'

'Yes,' said Ethel, 'he has always gone round Randall's alley or the garden; he has said nothing, but has contrived to avoid it.'

'Well,' said Dr. May, after a pause, 'I hoped none of us knew the exact spot.'

'We don't; he never told us, but he was there.'

'Was he?' exclaimed her father; 'I had no notion of that. How came he there?'

'He went on with Mr. Ernescliffe, and saw it all,' said Ethel, as her father drew out her words, apparently with his eye; 'and then came up to my room so faint that he was obliged to lie on the floor ever so long.'

'Faint—how long did it last?' said her father, examining her without apparent emotion, as if it had been an indifferent patient.

‘I don’t know, things seemed so long that evening. Till after dark at least, and it came on in the morning—no, the Monday. I believe it was your arm—for talking of going to see you always brought it on, till Mr. Ward gave him a dose of brandy-and-water, and that stopped it.

‘I wish I had known this before. Derangement of the nervous system, no doubt—a susceptible boy like that—I wonder what sort of nights he has been having.’

‘Terrible ones,’ said Ethel; ‘I don’t think he ever sleeps quietly till morning; he has dreams, and he groans and talks in his sleep: Harry can tell you all that.’

‘Bless me!’ cried Dr. May, in some anger; ‘what have you all been thinking about to keep this to yourselves all this time!’

‘He could not bear to have it mentioned,’ said Ethel, timidly; ‘and I didn’t know that it signified so much; does it?’

‘It signifies so much, that I had rather have given a thousand pounds than have let him go on all this time, to be overworked at school, and wound up to that examination!’

‘Oh dear! I am sorry!’ said Ethel, in great dismay. ‘If you had but been at home when Cheviot wanted Harry to have sent for you—because he did not think him fit for it!’ And Ethel was much relieved by pouring out all she knew, though her alarm was by no means lessened by the effect it produced on her father, especially when he heard of the “funny state.”

‘A fine state of things,’ he said; ‘I wonder it has not brought on a tremendous illness by this time. A boy of that sensitive temperament meeting with such a shock—never looked after—the quietest and most knocked down of all, and therefore the most neglected—his whole system disordered—and then driven to school to be harassed and overworked; if we wanted to occasion a brain fever we could not have gone a better way to set about it.’ I should not wonder if health and nerves were damaged for life!’

‘Oh! papa, papa!’ cried Ethel, in extreme distress, ‘what shall I do! I wish I had told you, but—’

‘I’m not blaming you, Ethel, you knew no better, but it has been grievous neglect. It is plain enough there is no one to see after you,’ said the Doctor with a low groan.

‘We may be taking it in time,’ said Margaret’s soft voice—‘it is very well it has gone on no longer.’

‘Three months is long enough,’ said Dr. May.

‘I suppose,’ continued Margaret, ‘it will be better not to let dear Norman know we are uneasy about him.’

‘No, no, certainly not. Don’t say a word of this to him. I shall find Harry, and ask about these disturbed nights, and then watch him, trusting it may not have been gone too far; but there must be dreadful excitability of brain!’

He went away, leaving Margaret to comfort Ethel as well as she could, by showing her that he had not said the mischief was

done, putting her in mind that he was wont to speak strongly; and trying to make her thankful that her brother would now have such care as might avert all evil results.

'But, oh,' said Ethel, 'his success has been dearly purchased!'

CHAPTER XII.

'It bath do me mochil woe.'
 'Yea bath it? Use,' quod he, 'this medicine;
 Every daie this Maie or that thou dine,
 Go lokin in upon the freshe daisie,
 And though thou be for woe in poinet to die,
 That shall full gretly lessen thee of thy pine.'

CHAUCER.

THAT night Norman started from, what was not so much sleep as a trance of oppression and suffering, and beheld his father's face watching him attentively.

'Papa! What's the matter?' said he, starting it up. 'Is anyone ill?'

'No; no one, lie down again,' said Dr. May, possessing himself of a hand, with a burning spot in the palm, and a throbbing pulse.

'But what made you come here? Have I disturbed anyone? Have I been talking?'

'Only mumbling a little, but you looked very uncomfortable.'

'But I'm not ill—what are you feeling my pulse for?' said Norman, uneasily.

'To see whether that restless sleep has quickened it.'

Norman scarcely let his father count for a moment, before he asked, 'What o'clock is it?'

'A little after twelve.'

'What does make you stay up so late, papa?'

'I often do when my arm seems likely to keep me awake. Richard has done all I want.'

'Pray don't stay here in the cold,' said Norman, with feverish impatience, as he turned upwards the cool side of his pillow. 'Good night!'

'No hurry,' said his father, still watching him.

'There's nothing the matter,' repeated the boy.

'Do you often have such unquiet nights?'

'Oh, it does not signify. Good night,' and he tried to look settled and comfortable.

'Norman,' said his father, in a voice betraying much grief, 'it will not do to go on in this way. If your mother was here, you would not close yourself against her.'

Norman interrupted him in a voice strangled with sobs: 'It is no good saying it—I thought it would only make it worse for you; but that's it. I cannot bear the being without her.'

Dr. May was glad to see that a gush of tears followed this exclamation, as Norman hid his face under the coverings.

'My poor boy,' said he, hardly able to speak, 'only One can comfort you truly; but you must not turn from me; you must let me do what I can for you, though it is not the same.'

'I thought it would grieve you more,' said Norman, turning his face toward him again.

'What, to find my children feeling with me, and knowing what they have lost? Surely not, Norman.'

'And it is of no use,' added Norman, hiding his face again, 'no one can comfort—'

'There you are wrong,' said Dr. May with deep feeling, 'there is much of comfort in everything, in everybody, in kindness, in all around, if one can only open one's mind to it. But I did not come to keep you awake with such talk; I saw you were not quite well, so I came up to see about you; and now, Norman, you will not refuse to own that something is the matter.'

'I did not know it,' said Norman, 'I really believe I am well, if I could get rid of these horrible nights. I either lie awake, tumbling and tossing, or I get all sorts of unbearable dreams.'

'Aye, when I asked master Harry about you, all the answer I could get was, that he was quite used to it, and did not mind it at all. As if I asked for his sake! How fast that boy sleeps—he is fit for a midshipman's berth!'

'But do you think there is anything amiss with me?'

'I shall know more about that to-morrow morning. Come to my room as soon as you are up, unless I come to you. Now, I have something to read before I go to bed, and I may as well try if it will put you to sleep.'

Norman's last sight that night was of the outlines of his father's profile, and he was scarcely awake the next morning before Dr. May was there again.

Unwilling as he had been to give way, it was a relief to relinquish the struggle to think himself well, and to venture to lounge and dawdle, rest his heavy head, and stretch his inert limbs without fear of remark. His father found him after breakfast lying on the sofa in the drawing-room with a Greek play by his side, telling Ethel what words to look out.

'At it again!' exclaimed Dr. May. 'Carry it away, Ethel. I will have no Latin or Greek touched these holidays.'

'You know,' said Norman, 'if I don't sap, I shall have no chance of keeping up.'

'You'll keep no where, if you don't rest.'

'It is only Euripides, and I can't do anything else,' said Norman, languidly.

'Very likely, I don't care. You have to get well first of all, and the Greek will take care of itself. Go up to Margaret. I put

you in her keeping, while I am gone to Whitford. After that, I dare say Richard will be very glad to have a holiday, and let you drive me to Abbotstoke.'

Norman rose, and wearily walked up stairs, while his sister lingered to excuse herself. 'Papa, I do not think Euripides would hurt him—he knows it all so well, and he said he could not read anything else.'

'Just so, Ethel. Poor fellow, he has not spirits or energy for anything; his mind was forced into those classicalities when it wanted rest, and now it has not spring enough to turn back again.'

'Do you think him so very ill?'

'Not exactly, but there's low fever hanging about him, and we must look after him well, and I hope we may get him right. I have told Margaret about him; I can't stop any longer now.'

Norman found the baby in his sister's room, and this was just what suited him. The Daisy showed a marked preference for her brothers; and to find her so merry and good with him, pleased and flattered him far more than his victory at school. He carried her about, danced her, whistled to her, and made her admire her pretty blue eyes in the glass most successfully, till nurse carried her off. But perhaps he had been sent up rather too soon, for as he sat in the great chair by the fire, he was teased by the constant coming and going, all the petty cares of a large household transacted by Margaret—orders to butcher and cook—Harry racing in to ask to take Tom to the river—Tom, who was to go when his lesson was done, coming perpetually to try to repeat the same unhappy bit of *As in Præsentis*, each time in a worse whine.

'How can you bear it, Margaret?' said Norman, as she finally dismissed Tom, and laid down her account-book, taking up some delicate fancy work. 'Mercy, here's another,' as enter a message about lamp oil, in the midst of which Mary burst in to beg Margaret to get Miss Winter to let her go to the river with Harry and Tom.

'No, indeed, Mary, I could not think of such a thing. You had better go back to your lessons, and don't be silly,' as she looked much disposed to cry.

'No one but a Tom-boy would dream of it,' added Norman, and Mary departed disconsolate, while Margaret gave a sigh of weariness, and said, as she returned to her work, 'There, I believe I have done. I hope I was not cross with poor Mary, but it was rather too much to ask.'

'I can't think how you can help being cross to everyone,' said Norman, as he took away the books she had done with.

'I am afraid I am,' said Margaret, sadly. 'It does get trying at times.'

'I should think so. This eternal worrying must be more than anyone can bear, always lying there too.'

'It is only now and then that it grows tiresome,' said Margaret. 'I am too happy to be of some use, and it is too bad to repine, but sometimes a feeling comes of its being always the same, as if a little change would be *such* a treat.'

'Arn't you very tired of lying in bed?'

'Yes, very sometimes. I fancy, but it is only fancy, that I could move better if I was up and dressed. It has seemed more so lately, since I have been stronger.'

'When do you think they will let you get up?'

'There's the question. I believe papa thinks I might be lifted to the sofa now—and oh! how I long for it—but then Mr. Ward does not approve of my sitting up, even as I am doing now, and wants to keep me flat. Papa thinks that of no use, and likely to hurt my general health, and I believe the end of it will be that he will ask Sir Matthew Fleet's opinion.'

Is that the man he calls Mat?'

'Yes, you know they went through the University together, and were at Edinburgh and Paris, but they have never met since he set up in London, and grew so famous. I believe it would be a great treat to papa to have him, and it would be a good thing for papa too; I don't think his arm is going on right—he does not trust to Mr. Ward's treatment, and I am sure some one else ought to see it.'

'Did you know, Margaret, that he sits up quite late, because he cannot sleep for it?'

'Yes, I hear him moving about, but don't tell him so; I would not have him guess for the world, that it kept me awake.'

'And does it?'

'Why, if I think he is awake and in pain, I cannot settle myself to sleep, but that is no matter; having no exercise, of course I don't sleep so much. But I am very anxious about him—he looks so thin, and gets so fagged—and no wonder.'

'Ah! Mr. Everard told me he was quite shocked to see him, and would hardly have known him,' and Norman groaned from the bottom of his heart.

'Well, I shall hope much from Sir Matthew's taking him in hand,' said Margaret, cheerfully; 'he will mind him, though he will not Mr. Ward.'

'I wish the holidays were over!' said Norman, with a yawn, as expressive as a sigh.

'That's not civil, on the third day,' said Margaret, smiling, 'when I am so glad to have you to look after me, so as to set Flora at liberty.'

'What, can I do you any good?' said Norman, with a shade of his former alacrity.

'To be sure you can, a great deal. Better not come near me otherwise, for I make everyone into a slave. I want my morning reading now, that book on Advent, there.'

'Shall I read it to you?'

‘Thank you, that’s nice, and I shall get on with baby’s frock.’

Norman read, but, ere long, took to yawning; Margaret begged for the book, which he willingly resigned, saying, however, that he liked it, only he was stupid. She read on aloud, till she heard a succession of heavy breathings, and saw him fast asleep, and so he continued till waked by his father’s coming home.

Richard and Ethel were glad of a walk, for Margaret had found them a pleasant errand. Their Cocksmoor children could not go home to dinner between service and afternoon school, and Margaret had desired the cook to serve them up some broth in the back kitchen, to which the brother and sister were now to invite them. Mary was allowed to take her boots to Rebekah Watts, since Margaret held that goodness had better be profitable, at least at the outset; and Harry and Tom joined the party.

Norman, meantime, was driving his father—a holiday preferment highly valued in the days when Dr. May used only to assume the reins, when his spirited horses showed too much consciousness that they had a young hand over them, or when the old hack took a fit of laziness. Now, Norman needed Richard’s assurance that the bay was steady, so far was he from being troubled with his ancient desire, that the steed would rear right up on his hind legs.

He could neither talk nor listen till he was clear out of the town, and found himself master of the animal, and even then the words were few, and chiefly spoken by Dr. May, until after going along about three miles of the turnpike road, he desired Norman to turn down a cross-country lane.

‘Where does this lead?’

‘It comes out at Abbotstoke, but I have to go to an outlying farm.’

‘Papa,’ said Norman, after a few minutes, ‘I wish you would let me do my Greek.’

‘Is that what you have been pondering all this time? What, may not the *bonus Hæmerus* slumber sometimes?’

‘It is not Homer, it is Euripides. I do assure you, papa, it is no trouble, and I get much worse without it.’

‘Well, stop here, the road grows so bad that we will walk, and let the boy lead the horse to meet us at Woodcote.’

Norman followed his father down a steep narrow lane, little better than a stony water-course, and began to repeat, ‘If you would but let me do my work! I’ve got nothing else to do, and now they have put me up, I should not like not to keep my place.’

‘Very likely, but—hollo—how swelled this is!’ said Dr. May, as they came to the bottom of the valley, where a stream rushed along, coloured with a turbid creamy yellow, making little whirlpools where it crossed the road, and brawling loudly just above where it roared and foamed between two steep banks of rock, crossed by a foot-bridge of planks, guarded by a handrail of rough poles. The

Doctor had traversed it, and gone a few paces beyond, when, looking back, he saw Norman very pale, with one foot on the plank, and one hand grasping the rail. He came back, and held out his hand, which Norman gladly caught at, but no sooner was the other side attained, than the boy, though he gasped with relief exclaimed, 'This is too bad!' Wait one moment, please, and let me go back.'

He tried, but the first touch of the shaking rail, and glance at the chasm, disconcerted him, and his father, seeing his white cheeks and rigid lips, said, 'Stop, Norman, don't try it. You are not fit,' he added, as the boy came to him reluctantly.

'I can't bear to be such a wretch!' said he. 'I never used to be. I will not—let me conquer it;' and he was turning back, but the Doctor took his arm, saying decidedly, 'No, I won't have it done. You are only making it worse, by putting a force on yourself.'

But the further Norman was from the bridge, the more displeased he was with himself, and more anxious to dare it again. 'There's no bearing it,' he muttered; 'let me only run back. I'll overtake you. I must do it if no one looks on.'

'No such thing,' said the Doctor, holding him fast. 'If you do, you'll have it all over again at night.'

'That's better than to know I am worse than Tom.'

'I tell you, Norman, it is no such thing. You will recover your tone if you will only do as you are told, but your nerves have had a severe shock, and when you force yourself in this way, you only increase the mischief.'

'Nerves,' muttered Norman, disdainfully, 'I thought they were only fit for fine ladies.'

Dr. May smiled. 'Well, will it content you if I promise that as soon as I see fit, I'll bring you here, and let you march over that bridge as often as you like?'

'I suppose I must be contented, but I don't like to feel like a fool.'

'You need not while the moral determination is sound.'

'But my Greek, papa.'

'At it again—I declare, Norman, you are the worst patient I ever had!'

Norman made no answer, and Dr. May presently said 'Well, let me hear what you have to say about it. I assure you it is not that I don't want you to get on, but that I see you are in great need of rest.'

'Thank you, papa. I know you mean it for my good, but I don't think you do know how horrid it is. I have got nothing on earth to do or care for—the school work comes quite easy to me, and I'm sure thinking is worse; and then,' Norman spoke vehemently, 'now they have put me up, it will never do to be beaten, and all the four others ought to be able to do it. I did not want or expect to be Dux, but now I am, you could not bear me not to keep my place, and to

miss the Randall scholarship, as I certainly shall, if I do not work these whole holidays.'

'Norman, I know it,' said his father, kindly. 'I am very sorry for you, and I know I am asking of you what I could not have done at your age—indeed, I don't believe I could have done it for you a few months ago. It is my fault that you have been let alone, to have an overstrain and pressure on your mind, when you were not fit for it, and I cannot see any remedy but complete freedom from work. At the same time, if you fret and harass yourself about being surpassed, that is, as you say, much worse for you than Latin and Greek. Perhaps I may be wrong, and study might not do you the harm I think it would; at any rate, it is better than tormenting yourself about next half year, so I will not positively forbid it, but I think you had much better let it alone. I don't want to make it a matter of duty. I only tell you this, that you may set your mind at rest as far as I am concerned. If you do lose your place, I will consider it as my own doing, and not be disappointed. I had rather see you a healthy, vigorous, useful man, than a poor puling nervous wretch of a scholar, if you were to get all the prizes in the University.'

Norman made a little murmuring sound of assent, and both were silent for some moments, then he said; 'Then you will not be displeased, papa, if I do read, as long as I feel it does me no harm.'

'I told you I don't mean to make it a matter of obedience. Do as you please—I had rather you read than vexed yourself.'

'I am glad of it. Thank you, papa,' said Norman, in a much cheered voice.

They had, in the meantime, been mounting a rising ground, clothed with stunted wood, and came out on a wide heath, brown with dead bracken; a hollow, traced by the tops of leafless trees, marked the course of the stream that traversed it, and the inequalities of ground becoming more rugged in outlines and greyer in colouring as they receded, till they were closed by a dark fir wood, beyond which rose in extreme distance, the grand mass of Welsh mountain heads, purpled against the evening sky, except where the crowning peaks bore a veil of snow. Behind, the sky was pure gold, gradually shading into pale green, and then into clear light wintry blue, while the sun setting behind two of the loftiest, seemed to confound their outlines, and blend them in one flood of soft hazy brightness. Dr. May looked at his son, and saw his face clear up, his brow expand, and his lips unclose with admiration.

'Yes,' said the Doctor, 'it is very fine, is it not? I used to bring mamma here now and then for a treat, because it put her in mind of her Scottish hills. Well, yours are the golden hills of heaven, now, my Maggie!' he added, hardly knowing that he spoke aloud. Norman's throat swelled, as he looked up in his face, then cast down his eyes hastily to hide the tears that had gathered on his eyelashes.

'I'll leave you here,' said Dr. May, 'I have to go to a farmhouse close by, in the hollow behind us, there's a girl recovering from a fever. I'll not be ten minutes, so wait here.'

When he came back, Norman was still where he had left him gazing earnestly, and the tears standing on his cheeks. He did not move till his father laid his hand on his shoulder—they walked away together without a word, and scarcely spoke all the way home.

Dr. May went to Margaret, and talked to her of Norman's fine character, and intense affection for his mother, the determined temper, and quietly borne grief, for which the Doctor seemed to have worked himself into a perfect enthusiasm of admiration; but lamenting that he could not tell what to do with him—study or no study hurt him alike—and he dreaded to see health and spirits shattered for ever. They tried to devise change of scene, but it did not seem possible just at present; and Margaret, beside her fears for Norman, was much grieved to see this added to her father's troubles.

At night Dr. May again went up to see whether Norman, whom he had moved into Margaret's former room, were again suffering from fever. He found him asleep in a restless attitude, as if he had just dropped off, and waking almost at the instant of his entrance, he exclaimed, 'Is it you? I thought it was mamma. She said it was all ambition.'

Then starting, and looking round the room, and at his father, he collected himself, and said, with a slight smile, 'I didn't know I had been asleep. I was awake just now, thinking about it. Papa, I'll give it up. I'll try to put next half out of my head, and not mind if they do pass me.'

'That's right, my boy,' said the Doctor.

'At least if Cheviot and Forder do, for they ought. I only hope Anderson won't. I can stand any thing but that. But that is nonsense too.'

'You are quite right, Norman,' said the Doctor, 'and it is a great relief to me that you see the thing so sensibly.'

'No, I don't see it sensibly at all, papa. I hate it all the time, and I don't know whether I can keep from thinking of it, when I have nothing to do; but I see it is wrong; I thought all ambition and nonsense was gone out of me, when I cared so little for the examination; but now I see, though I did not want to be made first, I can't bear not to be first; and that's the old story, just as *she* used to tell me to guard against ambition. So I'll take my chance, and if I should get put down, why 'twas not fair that I should be put up, and it is what I ought to be, and serves me right into the bargain—'

'Well, that's the best sort of sense, your mother's sense,' said the Doctor, more affected than he liked to show. 'No wonder she came to you in your dream, Norman, my boy, if you had come to

such a resolution. I was half in hopes you had some such notion when I came upon you, on Far-view down.'

'I think that sky did it,' said Norman, in a low voice; 'it made me think of her in a different way—and what you said too.'

'What did I say? I dont remember.'

But Norman could not repeat the words, and only murmured 'golden hills'—It was enough.

'I see,' said the Doctor, 'you had dwelt on the blank here, not taken home what it is to her.'

'Aye'—almost sobbed Norman, 'I never could before—that made me,' after a long silence, 'and then I know how foolish I was, and how she would say it was wrong to make this fuss, when you did not like it, about my place, and it was not for the sake of my duty, but of ambition; I knew that, but till I went to bed to-night, I could not tell whether I could make up my mind, so I would say nothing.'

CHAPTER XIII.

'The days are sad, it is the Holy tide,
When flowers have ceased to blow and birds to sing.'

F. TENNYSON.

IT had been a hard struggle to give up all thoughts of study, and Norman was not at first rewarded for it, but rather exemplified the truth of his own assertion that he was worse without it; for when this sole occupation of his mind was taken away, he drooped still more. He would willingly have shown his father that he was not discontented, but he was too entirely unnerved to be either cheerful or capable of entering with interest into any occupation. If he had been positively ill, the task would have been easier, but the low intermittent fever that hung about him, did not confine him to bed, only kept him lounging, listless and forlorn, through the weary day, not always able to go out with his father, and on Christmas-Day unfit even for Church.

All this made the want of his mother, and the vacancy in his home, still more evident, and nothing was capable of relieving his sadness but his father's kindness, which was a continual surprise to him. Dr. May was a parent who could not fail to be loved and honoured; but, as a busy man, trusting all at home to his wife, he had only appeared to his children either as a merry playfellow, or as a stern paternal authority, not often in the intermediate light of guiding friend, or gentle guardian; and it affected Norman exceedingly to find himself, a tall school-boy, watched and soothed with motherly tenderness and affection; with complete comprehension of his feelings, and delicate care of them. His father's solicitude and sympathy were round him day and night and this in the midst

of so much toil, pain, grief, and anxiety of his own, that Norman might well feel overwhelmed with the swelling, inexpressible feelings of grateful affection.

How could his father know exactly what he would like—say the very things he was thinking—see that his depression was not wilful repining—find exactly what best soothed him! He wondered, but he could not have said so to any one, only his eye brightened, and, as his sisters remarked, he never seemed half so uncomfortable when papa was in the room. Indeed, the certainty that his father felt the sorrow as acutely as himself, was one reason of his opening to him. He could not feel that his brothers and sisters did so, for, outwardly, their habits were unaltered, their spirits not lowered, their relish for things around much the same as before, and this had given Norman a sense of isolation. With his father it was different. Norman knew he could never appreciate what the bereavement was to him—he saw its traces in almost every word and look, and yet perceived that something sustained and consoled him, though not in the way of forgetfulness. Now and then Norman caught at what gave this comfort, and it might be hoped he would do so increasingly; though, on this Christmas-Day, Margaret felt very sad about him, as she watched him sitting over the fire, cowering with chilliness and headache, while every one was gone to Church, and saw that the reading of the service with her had been more of a trouble than a solace.

She tried to think it bodily ailment, and strove hard not to pine for her mother, to comfort them both, and say the fond words of refreshing cheering pity that would have made all light to bear. Margaret's home Christmas was so spent in caring for brother, father, and children, that she had hardly time to dwell on the sad change that had befallen herself.

Christmas was a season that none of them knew well how to meet: Blanche was overheard saying to Mary, that she wished it would not come, and Mary, shaking her head, and answering that she was afraid that was naughty, but it was very tiresome to have no fun. Margaret did her best up-stairs, and Richard down-stairs, by the help of prints and hymns, to make the children think of the true joy of Christmas, and in the evening their father gathered them round, and told them the stories of the Shepherds and of the Wise Men, till Mary and Blanche agreed, as they went up to bed, that it had been a very happy evening.

The next day Harry discomfited the school-room by bursting in with the news, that 'Louisa and Fanny Anderson were bearing down on the front door.' Ethel and Flora were obliged to appear in the drawing-room, where they were greeted by two girls, rather older than themselves. A whole shower of inquiries for Dr. May for Margaret, and for the dear little baby, were first poured out

then came hopes that Norman was well, as they had not seen him at Church yesterday.

‘Thank you, he was kept at home by a bad headache, but it is better to-day.’

‘We came to congratulate you on his success—we could not help it—it must have been such a pleasure to you.’

‘That it was!’ exclaimed Ethel, pleased at participation in her rejoicing. ‘We were so surprised.’

Flora gave a glance of warning, but Ethel’s short-sighted eyes were beyond the range of correspondence, and Miss Anderson continued. ‘It must have been a delightful surprise. We could hardly believe it when Harvey came in and told us. Everyone thought Forder was sure, but they were all put out by the questions of general information—those were all Mr. Everard’s doing.’

‘Mr. Everard was very much struck with Norman’s knowledge and scholarship too,’ said Flora.

‘So everyone says. It was all Mr. Everard’s doing, Miss Harrison told mamma, but, for my part, I am very glad for the sake of Stoneborough; I like a town boy to be at the head.’

‘Norman was sorry for Forder and Cheviot—’ began Ethel. Flora tried to stop her, but Louisa Anderson caught at what she said, and looked eagerly for more. ‘He felt,’ said she, only thinking of exalting her generous brother, ‘as if it was hardly right, when they are so much his seniors, and he could scarcely enjoy it.’

‘Ah! that is just what people say,’ replied Louisa. ‘But it must be very gratifying to you, and it makes him certain of the Randall scholarship too, I suppose. It is a great thing for him! He must have worked very hard.’

‘Yes, that he has,’ said Flora; ‘he is so fond of study, and that goes half way.’

‘So is dear Harvey. How earnest he is over his books! Mamma sometimes says, “Now Harvey, dear, you’ll be quite stupidified, you’ll be ill; I really shall get Dr. May to forbid you.” I suppose Norman is very busy too; it is quite the fashion for boys not to be idle now.’

‘Poor Norman can’t help it,’ said Ethel, piteously. ‘Papa will not hear of his doing any Latin or Greek these whole holidays.’

‘He thinks he will come to it better again for entire rest,’ said Flora, launching another look at her sister, which again fell short.

A great deal of polite inquiry whether they were uneasy about him, followed, mixed with a little boasting of dear Harvey’s diligence.

‘By-the-bye, Ethel, it is you that are the great patroness of the wild Cocksmoor children—are not you?’

Ethel coloured, and mumbled, and Flora answered for her, ‘Richard and Ethel have been there once or twice. You know our under nursery-maid is a Cocksmoor girl.’

‘Well, mamma said she could not think how Miss May could

take one from thence. The whole place is full of thieves, and do you know, Bessie Boulder has lost her gold pencil-case.'

'Has she?' said Flora.

'And she had it on Sunday when she was teaching her class.'

'Oh!' cried Ethel, vehemently; 'surely she does not suspect any of those poor children!'

'I only know such a thing never happened at school before,' said Fanny, 'and I shall never take anything valuable there again.'

'But is she sure she lost it at school?'

'O yes, quite certain. She will not accuse anyone, but it is not comfortable. And how those children do behave at Church!'

'Poor things! they have been sadly neglected,' said Flora.

'They are quite spoiling the rest, and they are such figures! Why don't you, at least, make them cut their hair? You know it is the rule of the school.'

'I know, but half the girls in the first class wear it long.'

'Oh, yes, but those are the superior people, that one would not be strict with, and they dress it so nicely too. Now these are like little savages.'

'Richard thinks it might drive them away to insist at first,' said Ethel; 'we will try to bring it about in time.'

'Well, Mrs. Ledwich is nearly resolved to insist, so you had better be warned, Ethel. She cannot suffer such untidiness and rags to spoil the appearance of the school, and, I assure you, it is quite unpleasant to the teachers.'

'I wish they would give them all to me!' said Ethel. 'But I do hope Mrs. Ledwich will have patience with them, for they are only to be gained gently.'

The visitors took their leave, and the two sisters began exclaiming—Ethel at their dislike of her *protégés*, and Flora at what they had said of Norman. 'And you, Ethel, how could you go and tell them we were surprised, and Norman thought it was hard on the other boys? They'll have it all over the town that he got it unjustly, and knows it, as they say already it was partiality of Mr. Everard's.'

'O no, no, they never can be so bad!' cried Ethel; 'they must have understood better that it was his noble humility and generosity.'

'They understand anything noble! No indeed! They think everyone like their own beautiful brother! I knew what they came for all the time; they wanted to know whether Norman was able to work these holidays, and you told them the very thing they wanted to hear. How they will rejoice with that Harvey, and make sure of the Randall!'

'O no, no!' cried Ethel; 'Norman must get that!'

'I don't think he will,' said Flora, 'losing all this time, while they are working. It cannot be helped, of course, but it is a great pity.'

'I almost wish he had not been put up at all, if it is to end in

this way,' said Ethel. 'It is very provoking, and to have them triumphing as they will! There's no bearing it!'

'Norman, certainly, is not at all well, poor fellow,' said Flora, 'and I suppose he wants rest, but I wish papa would let him do what he can. It would be much better for him than moping about as he is always doing now; and the disappointment of losing his place will be grievous, though now he fancies he does not care for it.'

'I wonder when he will ever care for anything again. All I read and tell him only seems to teaze him, though he tries to thank me.'

'There is a strange apathy about him,' said Flora, 'but I believe it is chiefly for want of exertion. I should like to rouse him if papa would let me; I know I could, by telling him how these Andersons are reckoning on his getting down. If he does, I shall be ready to run away, that I may never meet anyone here again.'

Ethel was very unhappy till she was able to pour all this trouble out to Margaret, and worked herself almost into crying about Norman's being passed by that 'Harvey,' and his sisters exulting, and papa being vexed, and Norman losing time and not caring.

'There you are wrong,' said Margaret; 'Norman did care very much, and it was not till he had seen clearly that it was a matter of duty to do as papa thought right, and not agitate his mind about his chances of keeping up, that he could bear to give up his work,' and she told Ethel a little of what had passed.

Ethel was much struck. 'But oh! Margaret, it is very hard, just to have him put up for the sake of being put down, and pleasing the Andersons!'

'Dear Ethel, why should you mind so much about the Andersons? May they not care about their brother as we do for ours?'

'Such a brother to care about!' said Ethel.

'But I suppose they may like him the best,' said Margaret, smiling.

'I suppose they do,' said Ethel, grudgingly; 'but still I cannot bear to see Norman doing nothing, and know Harvey Anderson will beat him.'

'Surely you had rather he did nothing than made himself ill.'

'To be sure, but I wish it wasn't so.'

'Yes; but, Ethel, whose doing is his getting into this state?'

Ethel looked grave. 'It was wrong of me,' said she, 'but then papa is not sure that Greek would hurt him.'

'Not sure, but he thinks it not wise to run the risk. But, Ethel, dear, why are you so bent on his being Dux at all costs?'

'It would be horrid if he was not.'

'Don't you remember you used to say that outward praise or honour was not to be cared for as long as one did one's duty, and that it might be a temptation?'

'Yes, I know I did,' said Ethel, faltering, 'but that was for one's self.'

'It is harder, I think, to feel so about those we care for,' said Margaret; 'but after all, this is just what will show whether our pride

in Norman is the right true loving pride, or whether it is only the family vanity of triumphing over the Andersons.'

Ethel hung her head. 'There's some of that,' she said, 'but it is not all. No—I don't want to triumph over them, nobody would do that.'

'Not outwardly, perhaps, but in their hearts.'

'I can't tell,' said Ethel, 'but it is the being triumphed over that I cannot bear.'

'Perhaps this is all a lesson in humility for us,' said Margaret.

It is teaching us, "Whosoever exalteth himself, shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

Ethel was silent for some little space, then suddenly exclaimed, 'And you think he will really be put down?'

Margaret seemed to have been talking with little effect, but she kept her patience, and answered, 'I cannot guess, Ethel, but I'll tell you one thing—I think there's much more chance if he comes to his work fresh and vigorous after a rest, than if he went on dulling himself with it all this time.'

With which Ethel was so far appeased that she promised to think as little as she could of the Andersons, and a walk with Richard to Coeksmoor turned the current of her thoughts. They had caught some more Sunday-school children by the help of Margaret's broth, but it was up-hill work; the servants did not like such guests in the kitchen, and they were still less welcome at school.

'What do you think I heard, Ethel?' said Flora the next Sunday as they joined each other in the walk from School to Church; 'I heard Miss Graves say to Miss Boulder, "I declare I must remonstrate. I undertook to instruct a national, not a ragged school;" and then Miss Boulder shook out her fine watered silk, and said, "It positively is improper to place ladies in contact with such squalid objects."'

'Ladies!' cried Ethel. 'A stationer's daughter and a banker's clerk's. Why do they come to teach at school at all?'

'Because our example makes it genteel,' said Flora.

'I hope you did something more in hopes of making it genteel.'

'I caught one of your ragged regiment with her frock gaping behind, and pinned it up. Such rags as there were under it! O Ethel!'

'Which was it!'

'That merry Irish-looking child. I don't know her name.'

'Oh! it is a real charming Irish name, Una M'Carthy. I am so glad you did it, Flora. I hope they were ashamed.'

'I doubt whether it will do good. We are sure of our station and can do anything—they are struggling to be ladies.'

'But we ought not to talk of them any more, Flora; here we are almost at the Churchyard.'

The Tuesday of this week was appointed for the visit of the London surgeon, Sir Matthew Fleet, and the expectation caused Dr. May to talk much to Margaret of old times, and the days of his courtship, when it had been his favourite project that his friend and fellow-student should

marry Flora Mackenzie, and there had been a promising degree of liking, but 'Mat' had been obliged to be prudent, and had ended by never marrying at all. This the Doctor, as well as his daughters, believed was for the sake of Aunt Flora, and thus the girls were a good deal excited about his coming, almost as much on his own account, as because they considered him as the abiter of Margaret's fate. He only came in time for a seven o'clock dinner, and Margaret did not see him that night, but heard enough from her sisters, when they came up to tell the history of their guest, and of the first set dinner when Flora had acted as lady of the house. The dinner it appeared had gone off very well. Flora had managed admirably, and the only mishap was some awkward carving of Ethel's which had caused the dish to be changed with Norman. As to the guest, Flora said he was very good-looking and agreeable. Ethel abruptly pronounced, 'I am very glad Aunt Flora married Uncle Arnott instead.'

'I can't think why,' said Flora. 'I never saw a person of pleasanter manners.'

'Did they talk of old times?' said Margaret.

'No,' said Ethel; 'that was the thing.'

'You would not have them talk of those matters in the middle of dinner,' said Flora.

'No,' again said Ethel; 'but papa has a way—don't you know, Margaret, how one can tell in a moment if it is company talk.'

'What was the conversation about?' said Margaret.

'They talked over some of their old fellow-students,' said Flora.

'Yes,' said Ethel; 'and then when papa told him that beautiful history of Dr. Spencer going to take care of those poor emigrants in the fever, what do you think he said? "Yes, Spencer was always doing extravagant things." Fancy that to papa, who can hardly speak of it without having to wipe his spectacles, and who so longs to hear of Dr. Spencer.'

'And what did he say?'

'Nothing; so Flora and Sir Matthew got to pictures and all that sort of thing, and it was all company talk after that.'

'Most entertaining in its kind,' said Flora: 'but—oh Norman!' as he entered—'why they are not out of the dining-room yet!'

'No; they are talking of some new invention, and most likely will not come for an hour.'

'Are you going to bed?'

'Papa followed me out of the dining-room to tell me to do so after tea.'

'Then sit down there, and I'll go and make some, and let it come up with Margaret's. Come, Ethel. Good night, Norman. Is your head aching to-night?'

'Not much, now I have got out of the dining-room.'

'It would have been wiser not to have gone in,' said Flora, leaving the room.

‘It was not the dinner, but the man,’ said Norman. ‘It is incomprehensible to me how my father could take to him. I’d as soon have Harvey Anderson for a friend!’

‘You are like me,’ said Ethel, ‘in being glad that he is not our uncle.’

‘He presume to think of falling in love with Aunt Flora!’ cried Norman, indignantly.

‘Why, what is the matter with him?’ asked Margaret. ‘I can’t find much ground for Ethel’s dislike, and Flora is pleased.’

‘She did not hear the worst, nor you either, Ethel,’ said Norman. ‘I could not stand the cold hard way he spoke of hospital patients. I am sure he thinks poor people nothing but a study, and rich ones nothing but a profit. And his half sneers! But what I hated most was his way of avoiding discussions. When he saw he had said what would not go down with papa, he did not honestly stand up to the point, and argue it out, but seemed to have no mind of his own, and to be only talking to please papa—but not knowing how to do it. He understand my father indeed!’

Norman’s indignation had quite revived him, and Margaret was much entertained with the conflicting opinions. The next was Richard’s, when he came in late to wish her good night, after he had been attending on Sir Matthew’s examination of his father’s arm. He did nothing but admire the surgeon’s delicacy of touch and understanding of the case, his view agreeing much better with Dr. May’s own than with Mr. Ward’s. Dr. May had never been entirely satisfied with the present mode of treatment, and Richard was much struck by hearing him say, in answer to Sir Matthew, that he knew his recovery might have been more speedy and less painful if he had been able to attend to it at first, or to afford time for being longer laid up. A change of treatment was now to be made, likely soon to relieve the pain, to be less tedious and troublesome, and to bring about a complete cure in three or four months at latest. In hearing such tidings, there could be little thought of the person who brought them, and Margaret did not, till the last moment, learn that Richard thought Sir Matthew very clever and sensible, and certain to understand her case. Her last visitor was her father: ‘Asleep, Margaret? I thought I had better go to Norman first in case he should be awake.’

‘Was he?’

‘Yes, but his pulse is better to-night. He was lying awake to hear what Fleet thought of me. I suppose Richard told you.’

‘Yes, dear papa, what a comfort it is!’

‘Those fellows in London do keep up to the mark! But I would not be there for something. I never saw a man so altered. However, if he can only do for you as well—but it is of no use talking about it. I may trust you to keep yourself calm, my dear?’

‘I am trying—indeed I am, dear papa. If you could help being

anxious for me—though I know it is worse for you, for I only have to lie still, and you have to settle for me. But I have been thinking how well off I am, able to enjoy so much, and be employed all day long. It is nothing to compare with that poor girl you told me of, and you need not be unhappy for me. I have some verses to say over to myself to-night:

“O Lord my God, do Thou Thy hōly will,
I will lie still,
I will not stir, lest I forsake Thine arm
And break the charm
That lulls me, clinging to my Father’s breast
In perfect rest.”

Is not that comfortable?’

‘My child—my dear child—I will say no more, lest I should break your sweet peace with my impatience. I will strive for the same temper, my Margaret. Bless you, dearest, good-night.’

After a night spent in waking intervals of such thoughts, Margaret found the ordinary morning, and the talk she could not escape, somewhat oppressive. Her brothers and sisters disturbed her by their open expressions of hope and anxiety; she dreaded to have the balance of tranquillity upset; and then blamed herself for selfishness in not being as ready to attend to them as usual. Ethel and Norman came up after breakfast, their aversion by no means decreased by further acquaintance. Ethel was highly indignant at the tone in which he had exclaimed, ‘What, May, have you one as young as this?’ on discovering the existence of the baby; and when Norman observed that was not so atrocious either, she proceeded, ‘You did not hear the contemptuous compassionate tone when he asked papa what he meant to do with all these boys.’

‘I’m glad he has not to settle,’ said Norman.

‘Papa said Harry was to be a sailor, and he said it was a good way to save expenses of education—a good thing.’

‘No doubt,’ said Norman, ‘he thinks papa only wants to get rid of us, or if not, that it is an amiable weakness.’

‘But I can’t see anything so shocking in this,’ said Margaret.

‘It is not the words,’ said Norman, ‘the look and tone convey it; but there are different opinions. Flora is quite smitten with him, he talks so politely to her.’

‘And Blanche!’ said Ethel. ‘The little affected pussy-cat made a set at him, bridled and talked in her mincing voice, with all her airs, and made him take a great deal of notice of her.’

Nurse here came to prepare for the surgeon’s visit.

It was over, and Margaret awaited the judgment. Sir Matthew had spoken hopefully to her, but she feared to fasten hopes on what might have no meaning, and could rely on nothing, till she had seen her father, who never kept back his genuine opinion, and would least of all from her. She found her spirits too much agitated to

talk to her sisters, and quietly begged them to let her be quite alone till the consultation was over, and she lay trying to prepare herself to submit thankfully, whether she might be bidden to resign herself to helplessness, or to let her mind open once more to visions of joyous usefulness. Every step she hoped would prove to be her father's approach, and the longest hour of her life was that before he entered her room. His face said that the tidings were good, and yet she could not ask.

'Well, Margaret, I am glad we had him down. He thinks you may get about again, though it may be a long time first.'

'Does he—oh papa!' and the colour spread over her face as she squeezed his hand very fast.

'He has known the use of the limbs return almost suddenly after even a year or two,' and Dr. May gave her the grounds of the opinion, and an account of other like cases, which he said had convinced him, 'though, my poor child,' he said, 'I feared the harm I had done you was irremediable, but thanks—' He turned away his face, and the clasp of their hands spoke the rest.

Presently he told Margaret that she was no longer to be kept prostrate, but she was to do exactly as was most comfortable to her, avoiding nothing but fatigue. She might be lifted to the sofa the next day, and if that agreed with her, she might be carried down stairs.

This, in itself, after she had been confined to her bed for three months, was a release from captivity, and all the brothers and sisters rejoiced as if she was actually on her feet again. Richard betook himself to constructing a reading-frame for the sofa; Harry tormented Miss Winter by insisting on a holiday for the others, and gained the day by an appeal to his father; then declared he should go and tell Mr. Wilmot the good news; and Norman, quite enlivened, took up his hat, and said he would come too.

In all his joy, however, Dr. May could not cease bewailing the alteration in his old friend, and spent half the evening in telling Margaret how different he had once been, in terms little less measured than Ethel's: 'I never saw such a change. Mat Fleet was one of the most warm, open-hearted fellows in the world, up to anything. I can hardly believe he is the same—turned into a mere machine, with a moving spring of self-interest! I don't believe he cares a rush for any living thing! Except for your sake, Margaret, I wish I had never seen him again, and only remembered him as he was at Edinburgh, as I remember dear old Spencer. It is a grievous thing! Ruined entirely! No doubt that London life must be trying—the constant change and bewilderments of patients preventing much individual care and interest. It must be very hardening. No family ties either, nothing to look to but pushing his way. Yes! there's great excuse for poor Mat. I never knew fully till now the blessing it was that your dear mother was willing to take me so early, and

that this place was open to me with all its home connexions and interests. I am glad I never had anything to do with London!’

And when he was alone with Norman, he could not help saying, ‘Norman, my boy, I’m more glad than ever you yielded to me about your Greek these holidays, and for the reason you did. Take care the love of rising and pushing never gets hold of you; there’s nothing that faster changes a man from his better self.’

Meanwhile, Sir Matthew Fleet had met another old college friend in London, and was answering his inquiries for the Dick May of ancient times.

‘Poor May! I never saw a man so thrown away. With his talent and acuteness, he might be the most eminent man of his day, if he had only known how to use them. But he was always the same careless soft-hearted fellow, never knowing how to do himself any good, and he is the same still, not a day older nor wiser. It was a fatal thing for him that there was that country practice ready for him to step into, and even of that he does not make as good a thing as he might. Of course he married early, and there he is, left a widower with a house full of children—screaming babies, and great tall sons growing up, and he without a notion what he shall do with them, as heedless as ever—saving nothing of course. I always knew it was what he would come to, if he would persist in burying himself in that wretched little country town, but I hardly thought, after all he has gone through, to find him such a mere boy still. And yet he is one of the cleverest men I ever met—with such talent, and such thorough knowledge of his profession, that it does one good to hear him talk. Poor May! I am sorry for him, he might have been anything, but that early marriage and country practice were the ruin of him.’

CHAPTER XIV.

‘To thee, dear maid, each kindly wile
Was known that elder sisters know,
To check the unseasonable smile
With warning hand and serious brow,

From dream to dream with her to rove,
Like fairy nurse with hermit child;
Teach her to think, to pray, to love,
Make grief less bitter, joy less wild.’

LINES ON A MONUMENT AT LITCHFIELD.

SIR Matthew Fleet’s visit seemed like a turning-point with the May family; rousing and giving them revived hopes. Norman began to shake off his extreme languor and depression, the Doctor was relieved from much of the wearing suffering from his hurt, and his despondency as to Margaret’s ultimate recovery had been driven away. The experiment of taking her up succeeded so well, that on Sunday

she was fully attired, 'fit to receive company.' As she lay on the sofa there seemed an advance toward recovery. Much sweet coquetry was expended in trying to look her best for her father; and her best was very well, for though the brilliant bloom of health was gone, her cheeks had not lost their pretty rounded contour, and still had some rosiness, while her large bright blue eyes smiled and sparkled. A screen shut out the rest of the room, making a sort of little parlour round the fire, where sundry of the family were visiting her after coming home from Church in the afternoon. Ethel was in a vehement state of indignation at what had that day happened at school. 'Did you ever hear anything like it! When the point was, to teach the poor things to be Christians, to turn them back, because their hair was not regulation length!'

'What's that! Who did?' said Dr. May, coming in from his own room, where he had heard a few words.

'Mrs. Ledwich. She sent back three of the Cocksmoor children this morning. It seems she warned them last Sunday without saying a word to us.'

'Sent them back from Church,' said the Doctor.

'Not exactly from Church,' said Margaret.

'It is the same in effect,' said Ethel, 'to turn them from school, for if they did try to go alone, the pew-openers would drive them out.'

'It is a wretched state of things!' said Dr. May, who never wanted much provocation to begin storming about parish affairs. 'When I am churchwarden again, I'll see what can be done about the seats; but it's no sort of use, while Ramsden goes on as he does.'

'Now my poor children are done for!' said Ethel. 'They will never come again. And it's horrid, papa; there are lots of town children who wear immense long plaits of hair, and Mrs. Ledwich never interferes with them. It is entirely to drive the poor Cocksmoor ones away—for nothing else, and all out of Fanny Anderson's chatter.'

'Ethel, my dear,' said Margaret, pleadingly.

'Didn't I tell you, Margaret, how, as soon as Flora knew what Mrs. Ledwich was going to do, she went and told her this was the children's only chance, and if we affronted them for a trifle, there would be no hope of getting them back. She said she was sorry, if we were interested for them, but rules must not be broken; and when Flora spoke of all who do wear long hair unmolested, she shuffled and said, for the sake of the teachers, as well as the other children, rags and dirt could not be allowed; and then she brought up the old story of Miss Boulder's pencil, though she has found it again, and ended by saying Fanny Anderson told her it was a serious annoyance to the teachers, and she was sure we should agree with her, that something was due to voluntary assistants and subscribers.'

'I am afraid there has been a regular set at them,' said Margaret, 'and perhaps they are troublesome, poor things.'

‘As if school keeping were for luxury!’ said Dr. May. ‘It is the worst thing I have heard of Mrs. Ledwich yet! One’s blood boils to think of those poor children being cast off because our fine young ladies are too grand to teach them! The Clergyman leaving his work to a set of conceited women, and they turning their backs on ignorance, when it comes to their door. Voluntary subscribers, indeed! I’ve a great mind I’ll be one no longer.’

‘Oh! papa, that would not be fair—’ began Ethel; but Margaret knew he would not act on this, squeezed her hand, and silenced her.

‘One thing I’ve said, and I’ll hold to it,’ continued Dr. May; ‘if they outvote Wilmot again in your Ladies’ Committee, I’ll have no more to do with them, as sure as my name’s Dick May. It is a scandal the way things are done here!’

‘Papa,’ said Richard, who had all the time been standing silent, ‘Ethel and I have been thinking, if you approved, whether we could not do something towards teaching the Cocks Moor children, and breaking them in for the Sunday school.’

What a bound Ethel’s heart gave, and how full of congratulation and sympathy was the pressure of Margaret’s hand!

‘What did you think of doing?’ said the Doctor.

Ethel burnt to reply, but her sister’s hand admonished her to remember her compact. Richard answered, ‘We thought of trying to get a room, and going perhaps once or twice a week to give them a little teaching. It would be little enough, but it might do something towards civilizing them, and making them wish for more.’

‘How do you propose to get a room?’

‘I have reconnoitred, and I think I know a cottage with a tolerable kitchen, which I dare say we might hire for an afternoon for sixpence.’

‘Ethel, unable to bear it any longer, threw herself forward, and sitting on the ground at her father’s feet, exclaimed, ‘O papa papa! do say we may!’

‘What’s all this about?’ said the Doctor, surprised.

‘Oh! you don’t know how I have thought of it day and night these two months!’

‘What! Ethel, have a fancy for two whole months, and the whole house not hear of it!’ said her father, with a rather provoking look of incredulity.

‘Richard was afraid of bothering you, and wouldn’t let me. But do speak, papa. May we?’

‘I don’t see any objection.’

She clasped her hands in ecstasy. ‘Thank you! thank you, papa! O Ritchie! Oh! Margaret!’ cried she, in a breathless voice of transport.

‘You have worked yourself up to a fine pass,’ said the Doctor, patting the agitated girl fondly as she leant against his knee. ‘Remember, slow and steady.’

'I've got Richard to help me,' said Ethel.

'Sufficient guarantee,' said her father, smiling archly as he looked up to his son, whose fair face had coloured deep red. 'You will keep the Unready in order, Ritchie.'

'He does,' said Margaret; 'he has taken her education into his hands, and I really believe he has taught her to hold up her frock and stick in pins.'

'And to know her right hand from her left, Eh, Ethel? Well, you deserve some credit, then. Suppose we ask Mr. Wilmot to tea, and talk it over.'

'O thank you, papa! When shall it be? To-morrow?'

'Yes, if you like, I have to go to the town-council meeting and am not going into the country, so I shall be in early.'

'Thank you. O how very nice!'

'And what about cost? Do you expect to rob me?'

'If you would help us,' said Ethel, with an odd shy manner; 'we meant to make what we have go as far as may be, but mine is only fifteen and sixpence.'

'Well, you must make interest with Margaret for the turn-out of my pocket to-morrow.'

'Thank you, we are very much obliged,' said the brother and sister, earnestly, 'that is more than we expected.'

'Ha! don't thank too soon. Suppose to-morrow should be a blank day.'

'Oh, it won't!' said Ethel. 'I shall tell Norman to make you go to paying people.'

'There's avarice!' said the Doctor. 'But look you here, Ethel, if you'll take my advice, you'll make your bargain for Tuesday. I have a note appointing me to call at Abbotstoke Grange on Mr. Rivers, at twelve o'clock, on Tuesday. What do you think of that, Ethel? An old banker, rich enough for his daughter to curl her hair in bank notes. If I were you, I'd make a bargain for him.'

'If he had nothing the matter with him, and I only got one guinea out of him!'

'Prudence! Well, it may be wiser.'

Ethel ran up to her room, hardly able to believe that the mighty proposal was made; and it had been so readily granted, that it seemed as if Richard's caution had been vain in making such a delay, that even Margaret had begun to fear that the street of by-and-by was leading to the house of never. Now, however, it was plain that he had been wise. Opportunity was everything; at another moment, their father might have been harassed and oppressed, and unable to give his mind to concerns, which now he could think of with interest, and Richard could not have caught a more favorable conjuncture.

Ethel was in a wild state of felicity all that evening and the next day, very unlike her brother, who, dismayed at the open step he

had taken, shrank into himself, and in his shyness dreaded the discussion in the evening, and would almost have been relieved, if Mr. Wilmot had been unable to accept the invitation. So quiet and grave was he, that Ethel could not get him to talk over the matter at all with her, and she was obliged to bestow all her transports and grand projects on Flora or Margaret, when she could gain their ears, besides conning them over to herself, as an accompaniment to her lessons, by which means she tried Miss Winter's patience almost beyond measure. But she cared not—she saw a gathering school and rising Church, which eclipsed all thoughts of present inattentions and gaucheries. She monopolized Margaret in the twilight, and rhapsodized to her heart's content, talking faster and faster, and looking more and more excited. Margaret began to feel a little overwhelmed, and while answering 'yes' at intervals, was considering whether Ethel had not been flying about in an absent inconsiderate mood all day, and whether it would seem unkind to damp her ardour, by giving her a hint that she was relaxing her guard over herself. Before Margaret had steeled herself, Ethel was talking of a story she had read, of a place something like Cocksmoor. Margaret was not ready with her recollection, and Ethel, saying it was in a magazine in the drawing-room chiffoniere, declared she would fetch it.

Margaret knew what it was to expect her visitors to return 'in one moment,' and with a 'now or never' feeling she began, 'Ethel dear, wait,' but Ethel was too impetuous to attend. 'I'll be back in a twinkling,' she called out, and down she flew, in her speed whisking away, without seeing it, the basket with Margaret's knitting and all her notes and papers, which lay scattered on the floor far out of reach, vexing Margaret at first, and then making her grieve at her own impatient feeling.

Ethel was soon in the drawing-room, but the right number of the magazine was not quickly forthcoming, and in searching she became embarked in another story. Just then, Aubrey, whose stout legs were apt to carry him into every part of the house where he was neither expected nor wanted, marched in at the open door, trying by dint of vehement gestures to make her understand, in his imperfect speech, something that he wanted. Very particularly troublesome she thought him, more especially as she could not make him out, otherwise than he wanted her to do something with the newspaper and the fire. She made a boat for him with an old newspaper, a very hasty and frail performance, and told him to sail it on the carpet, and be Mr. Ernescliffe going away; and she thought him thus safely disposed of. Returning to her book and her search, with her face to the cupboard, and her book held up to catch the light, she was soon lost in her story, and thought of nothing more till suddenly roused by her father's voice in the hall, loud and peremptory with alarm, 'Aubrey! put that down!' She

looked, and beheld Aubrey brandishing a great flaming paper—he dropped it at the exclamation—it fell burning on the carpet. Aubrey's white pinafore! Ethel was springing up, but in her cramped, twisted position, she could not do so quickly, and even as he called, her father strode by her, snatched at Aubrey's merino frock, which he crushed over the scarcely lighted pinafore, and trampled out the flaming paper with his foot. It was a moment of dreadful fright, but the next assured them that no harm was done.

'Ethel!' cried the Doctor, 'are you mad? What were you thinking of?'

Aubrey, here recollecting himself enough to be frightened at his father's voice and manner, burst into loud cries; the Doctor pressed him closer on his breast, caressed and soothed him. Ethel stood by, pale and transfixed with horror. Her father was more angry with her, than she had ever seen him, and with reason, as she knew, as she smelt the singeing, and saw a large burnt hole in Aubrey's pinafore, while the front of his frock was scorched and brown. Dr. May's words were not needed, 'What could make you let him?'

'I didn't see—' she faltered.

'Didn't see! Didn't look, didn't think, didn't care! That's it, Ethel. 'Tis very hard one can't trust you in a room with the child any more than the baby herself. His frock perfect tinder. He would have been burnt to a cinder, if I had not come in!'

Aubrey roared afresh, and Dr. May, kissing and comforting him, gathered him up under his left arm, and carried him away, looking back at the door to say, 'There's no bearing it! I'll put a stop to all schools and Greek, if it is to lead to this, and make you good for nothing!'

Ethel was too much terrified to know where she was, or anything, but that she had let her little brother run into fearful peril, and grievously angered her father; she was afraid to follow him, and stood still, annihilated, and in despair, till roused by his return, then, with a stifled sob, she exclaimed, 'Oh, papa!' and could get no further for a gush of tears.

But the anger of the shock of terror was over, and Dr. May was sorry for her tears, though still he could not but manifest some displeasure. 'Yes, Ethel,' he said, 'it was a frightful thing,' and he could not but shudder again. 'One moment later! It is an escape to be for ever thankful for—poor little fellow—but Ethel, Ethel, do let it be a warning to you.'

'O, I hope—I'll try—' sobbed Ethel.

'You have said you would try before.'

'I know I have,' said Ethel, choked. 'If I could but—'

'Poor child,' said Dr. May, sadly; then looking earnestly at her, 'Ethel, my dear, I am afraid of its being with you as—as it has been with me;' he spoke very low, and drew her close to him.

I grew up, thinking my inbred heedlessness a sort of grace, so to

say, rather manly—the reverse of finikin. I was spoilt as a boy and my Maggie carried on the spoiling, by never letting me feel its effects. By the time I had sense enough to regret this as a fault, I had grown too old for changing of ingrain, long-nurtured habits—perhaps I never wished it really. You have seen, and his voice was nearly inaudible, ‘what my carelessness has come to—let that suffice at least, as a lesson that may spare you—what your father must feel as long as he lives.’

He pressed his hand tightly on her shoulder, and left her, without letting her see his face. Shocked and bewildered, she hurried up-stairs to Margaret. She threw herself on her knees, felt her arms round her, and heard her kind soothing, and then, in broken words, told how dreadful it had been, and how kind papa had been, and what he had said, which was now the uppermost thought. ‘Oh! Margaret, Margaret, how very terrible it is! And does papa really think so?’

‘I believe he does,’ whispered Margaret.

‘How can he, can he bear it!’ said Ethel, clasping her hands. ‘O it is enough to kill one—I can’t think why it did not!’

‘He bears it,’ said Margaret, ‘because he is so very good, that help and comfort do come to him. Dear papa! He bears up because it is right, and for our sakes, and he has a sort of rest in that perfect love they had for each other. He knows how she would wish him to cheer up and look to the end, and support and comfort are given to him, I know they are; but oh, Ethel! it does make one tremble and shrink, to think what he has been going through this autumn, especially when I hear him moving about late at night, and now and then comes a heavy groan—whenever any especial care has been on his mind.’

Ethel was in great distress. ‘To have grieved him again!’ said she, ‘and just as he seemed better and brighter! Everything I do turns out wrong, and always will; I can’t do anything well by any chance.’

‘Yes you can, when you mind what you are about.’

‘But I never can—I’m like him, everyone says so, and he says the heedlessness is ingrain, and can’t be got rid of.’

‘Ethel, I don’t really think he could have told you so.’

‘I’m sure he said ingrain.’

‘Well, I suppose it is part of his nature, and that you have inherited it, but—’ Margaret paused—and Ethel exclaimed,

‘He said his was long-nurtured; yes, Margaret, you guessed right, and he said he could not change it, and no more can I.’

‘Surely, Ethel, you have not had so many years. You are fifteen instead of forty-six, and it is more a woman’s work than a man’s to be careful. You need not begin to despair. You were growing much better; Richard said so, and so did Miss Winter.’

‘What’s the use of it, if in one moment it is as bad as ever?’

And to-day, of all days in the year, just when papa had been so very, very kind, and given me more than I asked.'

'Do you know, Ethel, I was thinking whether dear mamma would not say that was the reason. You were so happy, that perhaps you were thrown off your guard.'

'I should not wonder if that was it,' said Ethel, thoughtfully. 'You know it was a sort of probation that Richard put me on. I was to learn to be steady before he spoke to papa, and now it seemed to be all settled and right, and perhaps I forgot I was to be careful still.'

'I think it was something of the kind. I was a little afraid before, and I wish I had tried to caution you, but I did not like to seem unkind.'

'I wish you had,' said Ethel. 'Dear little Aubrey! Oh! if papa had not been there! And I cannot think how, as it was, he could contrive to put the fire out, with his one hand, and not hurt himself. Margaret, it was terrible. How could I mind so little! Did you see how his frock was singed?'

'Yes, papa showed it to me. How can we be thankful enough! One thing I hope, that Aubrey was well frightened, poor little boy.'

'I know! I see now!' cried Ethel, 'he must have wanted me to make the fire blaze up, as Richard did one evening when we came in and found it low; I remember Aubrey clapping his hands and shouting at the flame; but my head was in that unhappy story, and I never had sense to put the things together, and reflect that he would try to do it himself. I only wanted to get him out of my way, dear little fellow. O! dear, how bad it was of me! All from being uplifted, and my head turned, as it used to be when we were happier. Oh! I wish Mr. Wilmot was not coming!'

Ethel sat for a long time with her head hidden in Margaret's pillows, and her hand clasped by her good elder sister. At last she looked up and said, 'O Margaret, I am so unhappy. I see the whole meaning of it now. Do you not? When papa gave his consent at last, I was pleased and set up, and proud of my plans. I never recollected what a silly, foolish girl I am, and how unfit. I thought Mr. Wilmot would think great things of it—it was all wrong and self-satisfied. I never prayed at all that it might turn out well, and so now it won't.'

'Dearest Ethel, I don't see that. Perhaps it will do all the better for your being humbled about it now. If you were wild and high flying, it would never go right.'

'It's hope is in Richard,' said Ethel.

'So it is,' said Margaret.

'I wish Mr. Wilmot was not coming to-night,' said Ethel again.

It would serve me right if papa were to say nothing about it.'

Ethel lingered with her sister till Harry and Mary came up with Margaret's tea, and summoned her, and she crept down stairs,

and entered the room so quietly, that she was hardly perceived behind her boisterous brother. She knew her eyes were in no presentable state, and cast them down, and shrank back as Mr. Wilmot shook her hand and greeted her kindly.

Mr. Wilmot had been wont to come to tea, whenever he had anything to say to Dr. or Mrs. May, which was about once in ten or twelve days. He was Mary's godfather, and their most intimate friend in the town, and he had often been with them, both as friend and Clergyman, through their trouble—no later than Christmas-Day, he had come to bring the feast of that day to Margaret in her sick room. Indeed, it had been chiefly for the sake of the Mays that he had resolved to spend the holidays at Stoneborough taking the care of Abbotstoke, while his brother, the Vicar, went to visit their father. This was, however, the first time he had come in his old familiar way to spend an evening, and there was something in the resumption of former habits that painfully marked the change.

Ethel, on coming in, found Flora making tea, her father leaning back in his great chair in silence, Richard diligently cutting bread, and Blanche sitting on Mr. Wilmot's knee, chatting fast and confidentially. Flora made Harry dispense the cups, and called everyone to their places; Ethel timidly glanced at her father's face, as he rose and came into the light. She thought the lines and hollows were more marked than ever, and that he looked fatigued and mournful, and she felt cut to the heart; but he began to exert himself, and to make conversation, not, however, about Cocksmoor, but asking Mr. Wilmot what his brother thought of his new squire, Mr. Rivers.

'He likes him very much,' said Mr. Wilmot. 'He is a very pleasing person, particularly kind-hearted and gentle, and likely to do a great deal for the parish. They have been giving away beef and blankets at a great rate this Christmas.'

'What family is there?' asked Flora.

'One daughter, about Ethel's age, is there with her governess. He has been twice married, and the first wife left a son, who is in the dragoons, I believe. This girl's mother was Lord Cosham's daughter.'

So the talk lingered on, without much interest or life. It was rather keeping from saying nothing than conversation, and no one was without the sensation that she was missing, round whom all had been free and joyous—not that she had been wont to speak much herself, but nothing would go on smoothly or easily without her. So long did this last, that Ethel began to think her father meant to punish her by not beginning the subject that night, and though she owned that she deserved it, she could not help being very much disappointed.

At length, however, her father began: 'We wanted you to talk over a scheme that these young ones have been concocting. You

see, I am obliged to keep Richard at home this next term—it won't do to have no one in the house to carry poor Margaret. We can't do without him any way, so he and Ethel have a scheme of seeing what can be done for that wretched place, Cocksmeer.'

'Indeed!' said Mr. Wilmot, brightening and looking interested. 'It is sadly destitute. It would be a great thing if anything could be done for it. You have brought some children to school already I think. I saw some rough-looking boys, who said they came from Cocksmeer.'

This embarked the Doctor in the history of the ladies being too fine to teach the poor Cocksmeer girls; which he told with kindling vehemence and indignation, growing more animated every moment, as he stormed over the wonted subject of the bad system of management—ladies' committee—negligent incumbent—insufficient clergy—misappropriated tithes—while Mr. Wilmot, who had mourned over it, within himself, a hundred times already, and was doing a Curate's work on sufferance, with no pay, and little but mistrust from Mr. Ramsden, and absurd false reports among the more foolish part of the town, sat listening patiently, glad to hear the Doctor in his old strain, though it was a hopeless matter for discussion, and Ethel dreaded that the lamentation would go on till bed-time, and Cocksmeer be quite forgotten.

After a time they came safely back to the project, and Richard was called on to explain. Ethel left it all to him, and he, with rising colour, and quiet, unhesitating, though diffident manner, detailed designs that showed themselves to have been well matured. Mr. Wilmot heard, cordially approved, and, as all agreed that no time was to be lost, while the holidays lasted, he undertook to speak to Mr. Ramsden on the subject the next morning, and if his consent to their schemes could be gained, to come in the afternoon to walk with Richard and Ethel to Cocksmeer, and set their affairs in order. All the time Ethel said not a word, except when referred to by her brother; but when Mr. Wilmot took leave, he shook her hand warmly, as if he was much pleased with her. 'Ah!' she thought, 'if he knew how ill I have behaved! It is all show and hollowness with me.'

She did not know that Mr. Wilmot thought her silence one of the best signs for the plan, nor how much more doubtful he would have thought her perseverance, if he had seen her wild and vehement. As it was, he was very much pleased, and when the Doctor came out with him into the hall, he could not help expressing his satisfaction in Richard's well-judged and sensibly-described project.

'Aye, aye!' said the Doctor, 'there's much more in the boy than I used to think. He's a capital fellow, and more like his mother than any of them.'

'He is,' said Mr. Wilmot; 'there was a just, well-weighed sense and soberness in his plans that put me in mind of her every moment.'

Dr. May gave his hand a squeeze, full of feeling, and went up to tell Margaret. She, on the first opportunity told Richard, and made him happier than he had been for months, not so much in Mr. Wilnot's words, as in his father's assent to, and pleasure in them.

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CHAPTER XV.

Pitch thy behaviour low, thy projects high
 So shalt thou humble and magnanimous be;
 Sink not in spirit; who aimeth at the sky
 Shoots higher much than he that means a tree.
 A grain of glory mixed with humbleness,
 Cures both a fever and lethargic æss.

HERBERT.

'NORMAN, do you feel up to a long day's work?' said Dr. May, on the following morning. 'I have to set off after breakfast to see old Mrs. Gould, and to be at Abbotstoke Grange by twelve; then I thought of going to Fordholm, and getting Mrs. Cleveland to give us some luncheon—there are some poor people on they way to look at; and that girl on Far-view Hill; and there's another place to call at in coming home. You'll have a good deal of sitting in the carriage, holding Whitefoot, so if you think you shall be cold or tired, don't scruple to say so, and I'll take Adams to drive me.'

'No, thank you,' said Norman, briskly. 'This frost is famous.'

'It will turn to rain, I expect—it is too white,' said the Doctor, looking out at the window. 'How will you get to Cocksmoor, good people?'

'Ethel won't believe it rains unless it is very bad,' said Richard.

Norman set out with his father, and prosperously performed the expedition, arriving at Abbotstoke Grange at the appointed hour.

'Ha!' said the Doctor, as the iron gates of ornamental scroll work were swung back, 'there's a considerable change in this place since I was here last. Well kept up indeed! Not a dead leaf left under the old walnuts, and the grass looks as smooth as if they had a dozen gardeners rolling it every day.'

'And the drive,' said Norman, 'more like a garden-walk than a road! But oh! what a splendid cedar!'

'Isn't it! I remember that as long as I remember anything. All this fine rolling of turf, and trimming up of the place, does not make much difference to you, old fellow, does it? You don't look altered since I saw you last, when old Jervis was letting the place go to rack and ruin. So they have a new entrance—very handsome conservatory—flowers—the banker does things in style. There,' as Norman helped him off with his plaid, 'wrap yourself up well, don't get cold. The sun is gone in, and I should not wonder if the rain were coming after all. I'll not be longer than I can help.'

Dr. May disappeared from his son's sight through the conservatory, where, through the plate-glass, the exotics looked so fresh and perfumy, that Norman almost fancied that the scent reached him. 'How much poor Margaret would enjoy one of those camellias,' thought he, 'and these people have bushels of them for mere show. If I were papa, I should be tempted to be like Beauty's father, and carry off one. How she would admire it!'

Norman had plenty of time to meditate on the camellias, and then to turn and speculate on the age of the cedar, whether it could have been planted by the monks of Stoneborough Abbey, to whom the Grange had belonged, brought from Lebanon by a pilgrim, perhaps; and then he tried to guess at the longevity of cedars, and thought of asking Margaret, the botanist of the family. Then he yawned, moved the horse a little about, opined that Mr. Rivers must be very prosy, or have some abstruse complaint, considered the sky, and augured rain, buttoned another button of his rough coat, and thought of Miss Cleveland's dinner. Then he thought there was a very sharp wind, and drove about till he found a sheltered place on the lee side of the great cedar, looked up at it, and thought it would be a fine subject for verses, if Mr. Wilmot knew of it, and then proceeded to consider what he should make of them.

In the midst he was suddenly roused by the deep-toned note of a dog, and beheld a large black Newfoundland dog leaping about the horse in great indignation. 'Rollo! Rollo!' called a clear young voice, and he saw two ladies returning from a walk. Rollo, at the first call, galloped back to his mistress, and was evidently receiving an admonition, and promising good behaviour. The two ladies entered the house, while he lay down on the step, with his lion-like paw hanging down, watching Norman with a brilliant pair of hazel eyes. Norman, after a little more wondering when Mr. Rivers would have done with his father, betook himself to civil demonstrations to the creature, who received them with dignity, and presently, after acknowledging with his tail, various whispers of 'Good old fellow,' and 'Here, old Rollo!' having apparently satisfied himself that the young gentleman was respectable, he rose, and vouchsafed to stand up with his fore-paws in the gig, listening amiably to Norman's delicate flatteries. Norman even began to hope to allure him into jumping on the seat; but a great bell rang, and Rollo immediately turned round, and dashed off, at full speed, to some back region of the house.

'So, old fellow, you know what the dinner bell means,' thought Norman. 'I hope Mr. Rivers is hungry too. Miss Cleveland will have eaten up her whole luncheon, if this old bore won't let my father go soon! I hope he is desperately ill—'tis his only excuse! Heigh ho! I must jump out to warm my feet soon! There, there's a drop of rain! Well, there's no end to it! I wonder what Ethel is doing about Cocksmeer. It is setting in for a wet afternoon!' and Norman disconsolately put up his umbrella.

At last Dr. May and another gentleman were seen in the conservatory, and Norman gladly proceeded to clear the seat; but Dr. May called out, 'Jump out, Norman, Mr. Rivers is so kind as to ask us to stay to luncheon.'

With boyish shrinking from strangers, Norman privately wished Mr. Rivers at Jericho, as he gave the reins to a servant, and entered the conservatory, where a kindly hand was held out to him by a gentleman of about fifty, with a bald smooth forehead, soft blue eyes, and gentle pleasant face. 'Is this your eldest son?' said he, turning to Dr. May,—and the manner of both was as if they were already well acquainted. 'No, this is my second. The eldest is not quite such a long-legged fellow,' said Dr. May. And then followed the question addressed to Norman himself, where he was at school.

'At Stoneborough,' said Norman, a little amused at the thought how angry Ethel and Harry would be that the paragraph of the county paper where 'N. W. May' was recorded as prizeman and foremost in the examination, had not penetrated even to Abbotstoke Grange, or rather to its owner's memory.

However, his father could not help adding, 'He is the head of the school—a thing we Stoneborough men think much of.'

This, and Mr. Rivers's civil answer, made Norman so hot, that he did not notice much in passing through a hall full of beautiful vases, stuffed birds, busts, &c. tastefully arranged, and he did not look up till they were entering a handsome dining-room, where a small square table was laid out for luncheon near a noble fire.

The two ladies were there, and Mr. Rivers introduced them as his daughter and Mrs. Larpent. It was the most luxurious meal that Norman had ever seen, the plate, the porcelain, and all the appointments of the table so elegant, and the viands, all partaking of the Christmas character, and of a *recherché* delicate description quite new to him. He had to serve as his father's right hand, and was so anxious to put everything as Dr. May liked it, and without attracting notice, that he hardly saw or listened till Dr. May began to admire a fine Claude, on the opposite wall, and embarked in a picture discussion. The Doctor had much taste for art, and had made the most of his opportunities of seeing paintings during his time of study at Paris, and in a brief tour to Italy. Since that time, few good pictures had come in his way, and these were a great pleasure to him, while Mr. Rivers, a regular connoisseur, was delighted to meet with one who could so well appreciate them. Norman perceived how his father was enjoying the conversation, and was much interested both by the sight of the first fine paintings he had ever seen, and by the talk about their merits; but the living things in the room had more of his attention and observation, especially the young lady who sat at the head of the table; a girl about his own age; she was on a very small scale, and seemed to him like a fairy, in the airy lightness and grace of her movements, and the blithe gladness of her gestures

and countenance. Form and features, though perfectly healthful and brisk, had the peculiar finish and delicacy of a miniature painting, and were enhanced by the sunny glance of her dark soft smiling eyes. Her hair was in black silky braids, and her dress, with its gaiety of well-assorted colour, was positively refreshing to his eye, so long accustomed to the deep mourning of his sisters. A little Italian greyhound, perfectly white, was at her side, making infinite variations of the line of beauty and grace, with its elegant outline, and S-like tail, as it raised its slender nose in hopes of a fragment of bread which she from time to time dispensed to it.

Luncheon over, Mr. Rivers asked Dr. May to step into his library, and Norman guessed that they had been talking all this time, and had never come to the medical opinion. However, a good meal and a large fire made a great difference in his toleration, and, it was so new a scene, that he had no objection to a prolonged waiting, especially when Mrs. Larpent said, in a very pleasant tone ‘Will you come into the drawing-room with us?’

He felt somewhat as if he was walking in enchanted ground as he followed her into the large room, the windows opening into the conservatory, the whole air fragrant with flowers, the furniture and ornaments so exquisite of their kind, and all such a fit scene for the beautiful little damsel, who, with her slender dog by her side, tripped on demurely, and rather shyly, but with a certain skipping lightness in her step. A very tall overgrown school-boy did Norman feel himself for one bashful moment, when he found himself alone with the two ladies; but he was ready to be set at ease by Mrs. Larpent’s good-natured manner, when she said something of Rollo’s discourtesy. He smiled, and answered that he had made great friends with the fine old dog, and spoke of his running off to the dinner, at which little Miss Rivers laughed, and looked delighted, and began to tell of Rollo’s perfections and intelligence. Norman ventured to inquire the name of the little Italian, and was told it was Nipen, because it had once stolen a cake, much like the wind spirit in “Feats on the Fiord.” Its beauty and tricks were duly displayed, and a most beautiful Australian parrot was exhibited. Mrs. Larpent taking full interest in the talk, in so lively and gentle a manner, and she and her pretty pupil evidently on such sisterlike terms, that Norman could hardly believe her to be the governess, when he thought of Miss Winter.

Miss Rivers took up some brown leaves which she was cutting out with scissors, and shaping.—‘Our holiday work,’ said Mrs. Larpent, in answer to the inquiring look of Norman’s eyes. ‘Meta has been making a drawing for her papa, and is framing it in leather work. Have you ever seen any?’

‘Never!’ and Norman looked eagerly, asking questions, and watching while Miss Rivers cut out her ivy leaf and marked its veins, and showed how she copied it from nature. He thanked her

saying, 'I wanted to learn all about it, for I thought it would be such nice work for my eldest sister.'

A glance of earnest interest from little Meta's bright eyes at her governess, and Mrs. Larpent, in a kind, soft tone that quite gained his heart, asked, 'Is she the invalid?'

'Yes,' said Norman. 'New fancy work is a great gain to her.'

Mrs. Larpent's sympathetic questions, and Meta's softening eyes, gradually drew from him a great deal about Margaret's helpless state, and her patience, and capabilities, and how everyone came to her with all their cares; and Norman, as he spoke, mentally contrasted the life, untouched by trouble and care, led by the fair girl before him, with that atmosphere of constant petty anxieties round her namesake's couch, at years so nearly the same.

'How very good she must be,' said little Meta quickly and softly; and a tear was sparkling on her eyelashes.

'She is indeed,' said Norman earnestly. 'I don't know what papa would do but for her.'

Mrs. Larpent asked kind questions whether his father's arm was very painful, and the hopes of its cure; and he felt as if she was a great friend already. Thence they came to books. Norman had not read for months past, but it happened that Meta was just now reading 'Woodstock,' with which he was of course familiar; and both grew eager in discussing that and several others. Of one, Meta spoke in such terms of delight, that Norman thought it had been very stupid of him to let it lie on the table for the last fortnight without looking into it.

He was almost sorry to see his father and Mr. Rivers come in, and hear the carriage ordered, but they were not off yet, though the rain was now only Scotch mist. Mr. Rivers had his most choice little pictures still to display, his beautiful early Italian masters, finished like illuminations, and over these there was much lingering and admiring. Meta had whispered something to her governess, who smiled, and advanced to Norman. 'Meta wishes to know if your sister would like to have a few flowers?' said she.

No sooner said than done; the door into the conservatory was opened, and Meta, cutting sprays of beautiful geranium, delicious heliotrope, fragrant calycanthus, deep blue tree violet, and exquisite hothouse ferns; perfect wonders to Norman, who, at each addition to the bouquet, exclaimed by turns, 'Oh! thank you,' and 'how she will like it!'

Her father reached a magnolia blossom from on high, and the quick warm grateful emotion trembled in Dr. May's features and voice, as he said, 'It is very kind in you; you have given my poor girl a great treat. Thank you with all my heart.'

Margaret Rivers cast down her eyes, half smiled, and shrank back, thinking she had never felt anything like the left-handed grasp, so full of warmth and thankfulness. It gave her confidence to ven-

ture on the one question on which she was bent. Her father was in the hall, showing Norman his Greek nymph; and lifting her eyes to Dr. May's face, then casting them down, she coloured deeper than ever, as she said, in a stammering whisper, 'O please—if you would tell me—do you think—is papa very ill?'

Dr. May answered in his softest, most re-assuring tones: 'You need not be alarmed about him, I assure you. You must keep him from too much business,' he added, smiling; 'make him ride with you, and not let him tire himself, and I am sure you can be his best doctor.'

'But do you think,' said Meta, earnestly looking up, 'do you think he will be quite well again?'

'You must not expect doctors to be absolute oracles,' said he. 'I will tell you what I told him—I hardly think his will ever be sound health again, but I see no reason why he should not have many years of comfort, and there is no cause for you to disquiet yourself on his account—you have only to be careful of him.'

Meta tried to say 'thank you,' but not succeeding, looked imploringly at her governess, who spoke for her. 'Thank you, it is a great relief to have an opinion, for we were not at all satisfied about Mr. Rivers.'

A few words more, and Meta was skipping about like a sprite finding a basket for the flowers—she had another shake of the hand, another grateful smile, and 'thank you,' from the Doctor; and then, as the carriage disappeared, Mrs. Larpent exclaimed, 'What a very nice intelligent boy that was.'

'Particularly gentlemanlike,' said Mr. Rivers. 'Very clever—the head of the school, as his father tells me—and so modest and unassuming—though I see his father is very proud of him.'

'O, I am sure that they are so fond of each other,' said Meta; 'didn't you see his attentive ways to his father at luncheon. And, papa, I am sure you must like Dr. May, Mr. Wilmot's doctor, as much as I said you would.'

'He is the most superior man I have met with for a long time,' said Mr. Rivers. 'It is a great acquisition to find a man of such taste and acquirements in this country neighbourhood, when there is not another who can tell a Claude from a Poussin. I declare, when once we began talking, there was no leaving off—I have not met a person of so much conversation since I left town. I thought you would like to see him, Meta.'

'I hope I shall know the Miss Mays some time or other.'

'That is the prettiest little fairy I ever did see!' was Dr. May's remark, as Norman drove from the door.

'How good-natured they are!' said Norman; 'I just said something about Margaret, and she gave me all these flowers. How Margaret will be delighted! I wish the girls could see it all!

'So you got on well with the ladies, did you?'

'They were very kind to me. It was very pleasant!' said Norman, with a tone of enjoyment that did his father's heart good.

'I was glad you should come in. Such a curiosity shop is a sight, and those pictures were some of them well worth seeing. That was a splendid Titian.'

'That east of the Pallas of the Parthenon—how beautiful it was—I knew it from the picture in Smith's dictionary. Mr. Rivers said he would show me all his antiques if you would bring me again.'

'I saw he liked your interest in them. He is a good, kind-hearted dilettante sort of old man; he has got all the talk of the literary, cultivated society in London, and must find it dullish work here.'

'You liked him, didn't you?'

'He is very pleasant—I found he knew my old friend, Benson, whom I had not seen since we were at Cambridge together, and we got on that and other matters—London people have an art of conversation not learnt here, and I don't know how the time slipped away, but you must have been tolerably tired of waiting.'

'Not to signify,' said Norman. 'I only began to think he must be very ill; I hope there is not much the matter with him.'

'I can't say. I am afraid there is organic disease, but I think it may be kept quiet a good while yet, and he may have a pleasant life for some time to come, arranging his prints, and petting his pretty daughter. He has plenty to fall back upon.'

'Do you go there again?'

'Yes, next week. I am glad of it. I shall like to have another look at that little Madonna of his—it is the sort of picture that does one good to carry away in one's eye. Whay! Stop. There's an old woman in here. It is too late for Fordholm, but these cases won't wait.'

He went into the cottage and soon returned saying, 'Fine new blankets, and a great kettle of soup, and such praises of the ladies at the Grange!' And, at the next house, it was the same story. 'Well, 'tis no mockery now, to tell the poor creatures they want nourishing food. Slices of meat and bottles of port wine rain down on Abbot-stoke.'

A far more talkative journey than usual ensued; the discussion of the paintings and antiques was almost equally delightful to the father and son, and lasted till, about a mile from Stoneborough, they descried three figures in the twilight.

'Ha! How are you, Wilmot? So you braved the rain, Ethel Jump in,' called the Doctor, as Norman drew up.

'I shall crowd you—I shall hurt your arm, papa; thank you.'

'No you won't—jump in,—there's room for three thread-papers in one gig. Why Wilmot, your brother has a very jewel of a squire; How did you fare?'

'Very well on the whole,' was Mr. Wilmot's answer, while Ethel scrambled in, and tried to make herself small, an art in which she was not very successful; and Norman gave an exclamation of horrified

warning, as she was about to step into the flower-basket; then she nearly tumbled out again in dismay, and was relieved to find herself safely wedged in, without having done any harm, while her father called out to Mr. Wilmot, as they started, 'I say! You are coming back to tea with us.'

That cheerful tone, and the kindness to herself, were a refreshment and revival to Ethel, who was still sobered and shocked by her yesterday's adventure, and by the sense of her father's sorrowful displeasure. Expecting further to be scolded for getting in so awkwardly, she did not venture to volunteer anything, and even when he kindly said, 'I hope you are prosperous in your expedition,' she only made answer, in a very grave voice, 'Yes, papa, we have taken a very nice tidy room.'

'What do you pay for it?'

'Fourpence for each time.'

'Well, here's for you,' said Dr. May. 'It is only two guineas to-day; that banker at the Grange beguiled us of our time, but you had better close the bargain for him, Ethel—he will be a revenue for you, for this winter at least.'

'O thank you, papa,' was all Ethel could say; overpowered by his kindness, and more repressed by what she felt so unmerited, than she would have been by coldness, she said few words, and preferred listening to Norman, who began to describe their adventures at the Grange.

All her eagerness revived, however, as she sprung out of the carriage, full of tidings for Margaret; and it was almost a race between her and Norman to get up-stairs, and unfold their separate budgets.

Margaret's lamp had just been lighted, when they made their entrance, Norman holding the flowers on high.

'Oh! how beautiful, how delicious! For me? Where did you get them?'

'From Abbotstoke Grange; Miss Rivers sent them to you.'

'How very kind! What a lovely geranium, and oh, that fern! I never saw anything so choice. How came she to think of me.'

'They asked me in because it rained, and she was making the prettiest things, leather leaves and flowers for picture frames. I thought it was work that would just suit you, and learnt how to do it. That made them ask about you, and it ended by her sending you this nosegay.'

'How very kind every body is! Well, Ethel, are you come home too?'

'Papa picked me up—O Margaret, we have found such a nice room, a clean sanded kitchen—'

'You never saw such a conservatory—'

'And it is to be let to us for fourpence a time—'

'The house is full of beautiful things, pictures and statues. Only think of a real Titian, and a cast of the Apollo!'

‘Twenty children to begin with, and Richard is going to make some forms.’

‘Mr. Rivers is going to show me all his casts.’

‘O, is he? But only think how lucky we were to find such a nice woman; Mr. Wilmot was so pleased with her.’

Norman found one story at a time was enough, and relinquished the field, contenting himself with silently helping Margaret to arrange the flowers, holding the basket for her, and pleased with her gestures of admiration. Ethel went on with her history. ‘The first place we thought of would not do at all; the woman said she would not take half-a-crown a week to have a lot of children stabling about, as she called it; so we went to another house, and there was a very nice woman indeed, Mrs. Green, with one little boy, whom she wanted to send to school, only it is too far. She says she always goes to Church at Fordholm because it is nearer, and she is quite willing to let us have the room. So we settled it, and next Friday we are to begin. Papa has given us two guineas, and that will pay for, let me see, a hundred and twenty-six times, and Mr. Wilmot is going to give us some books, and Ritchie will print some alphabets. We told a great many of the people, and they are so glad. Old Granny Hall said, ‘Well, I never!’ and told the girls they must be as good as gold now the gentlefolks was coming to teach them. Mr. Wilmot is coming with us every Friday as long as the holidays last.’

Ethel departed on her father’s coming in to ask Margaret if she would like to have a visit from Mr. Wilmot. She enjoyed this very much, and he sat there nearly an hour, talking of many matters, especially the Cocks Moor scheme, on which she was glad to hear his opinion at first hand.

‘I am very glad you think well of it,’ she said. ‘It is most desirable that something should be done for those poor people, and Richard would never act rashly; but I have longed for advice whether it was right to promote Ethel’s undertaking. I suppose Richard told you how bent on it she was, long before papa was told of it.’

‘He said it was her great wish, and had been so for a long time past.’

Margaret, in words more adequate to express the possession the project had gained of Ethel’s ardent mind, explained the whole history of it. ‘I do believe she looks on it as a sort of call,’ said she, ‘and I have felt as if I ought not to hinder her, and yet I did not know whether it was right, at her age, to let her undertake so much.’

‘I understand, said Mr. Wilmot, ‘but, from what I have seen of Ethel, I should think you had decided rightly. There seems to me to be such a spirit of energy in her, that if she does not act she will either speculate and theorize, or pine and prey on herself. I do believe that hard homely work, such as this school-keeping, is the best outlet for what might otherwise run to extravagance—more especially as you say the hope of it has already been an incentive to improvement in home duties.’

‘That I am sure it has,’ said Margaret.

‘Moreover,’ said Mr. Wilmot, ‘I think you were quite right in thinking that to interfere with such a design was unsafe. I do believe that a great deal of harm is done by prudent friends, who dread to let young people do anything out of the common way, and so force their aspirations to ferment and turn sour, for want of being put to use.’

‘Still girls are told they ought to wait patiently, and not to be eager for self-imposed duties.’

‘I am not saying, that it is not the appointed discipline for the girls themselves,’ said Mr. Wilmot. ‘If they would submit, and do their best, it would doubtless prove the most beneficial thing for them; but it is a trial in which they often fail, and I had rather not be in the place of such friends.’

‘It is a great puzzle!’ said Margaret, sighing.

‘Ah! I daresay you are often perplexed,’ said her friend, kindly

‘Indeed I am. There are so many little details that I cannot be alway teasing papa with, and yet which I do believe form the character more than the great events, and I never know whether I act for the best. And there are so many of us, so many duties, I cannot half attend to any. Lately, I have been giving up almost everything to keep this room quiet for Norman in the morning, because he was so much harassed and hurt by bustle and confusion, and I found to-day that things have gone wrong in consequence.’

‘You must do the best you can, and try to trust that while you work in the right spirit, your failures will be compensated,’ said Mr. Wilmot. ‘It is a hard trial.’

‘I like your understanding it,’ said Margaret, smiling sadly. ‘I don’t know whether it is silly, but I don’t like to be pitied for the wrong thing. My being so helpless is what everyone laments over; but, after all, that is made up to me by the petting and kindness I get from all of them: but it is the being mistress of the house, and having to settle for everyone, without knowing whether I do right or wrong, that is my trouble.’

‘I am not sure, however, that it is right to call it a trouble, though it is a trial.’

‘I see what you mean,’ said Margaret. ‘I ought to be thankful. I know it is an honour, and I am quite sure I should be grieved if they did not all come to me and consult me as they do. I had better not have complained, and yet I am glad I did, for I like you to understand my difficulties.’

‘And, indeed, I wish to enter into them, and do or say anything in my power to help you. But I don’t know anything that can be of so much comfort as the knowledge that He who laid the burden on you, will help to bear it.’

‘Yes,’ said Margaret, pausing; and then, with a sweet look, though a heavy sigh, she said, ‘It is very odd how things turn out!’

I always had a childish fancy that I would be useful and important, but I little thought how it would be! However, as long as Richard is in the house, I always feel secure about the others, and I shall soon be downstairs myself. Don't you think dear papa in better spirits?'

'I thought so to-day—' and here the Doctor returned, talking of Abbotstoke Grange, where he had certainly been much pleased. 'It was a lucky chance,' he said, 'that they brought Norman in. It was exactly what I wanted to rouse and interest him, and he took it all in so well, that I am sure they were pleased with him. I thought he looked a very lanky specimen of too much leg and arm when I called him in, but he has such good manners, and is so ready and understanding, that they could not help liking him. It was fortunate I had him instead of Richard.—Ritchie is a very good fellow, certainly, but he had rather look at a steam-engine, any day, than at Raffaele himself.'

Norman had his turn by-and-by. He came up after tea, reporting that papa was fast asleep in his chair, and the others would go on about Cocks Moor till midnight, if they were let alone; and made up for his previous yielding to Ethel, by giving, with much animation, and some excitement, a glowing description of the Grange, so graphic, that Margaret said she could almost fancy she had been there.

'O Margaret, I wonder if you ever will! I would give something for you to see the beautiful conservatory. It is a real bower for a maiden of romance, with its rich green fragrance in the midst of winter. It is like a picture in a dream. One could imagine it a fairy land, where no care, or grief, or weariness could come, all choice beauty and sweetness waiting on the creature within. I can hardly believe that it is a real place, and that I have seen it.'

'Though you have brought these pretty tokens that your fairy is as good as she is fair,' said Margaret, smiling.

CHAPTER XVI.

EVANS. Peace your tattlings. What is fair, William?

WILLIAM. PULCHER.

QUICKLY. Poulcats! there are fairer things than poulcats sure!

EVANS. I pray you have your remembrance, child, accusative HING HANG HOG.

QUICKLY. HANG HOG is Latin for bacon, I warrant you.

SHAKESPEARE.

In a large family it must often happen, that since every member of it cannot ride the same hobby, nor at the same time, their several steeds must sometimes run counter to each other; and so Ethel found it, one morning when Miss Winter, having a bad cold, had given her an unwonted holiday.

Mr. Wilmot had sent a large parcel of books for her to choose from for Cocks Moor, but this she could not well do without consulta-

tion. The multitude bewildered her, she was afraid of taking too many or too few, and the being brought to these practical details made her sensible that though her schemes were very grand and full for future doings, they passed very lightly over the intermediate ground. The '*Pauló post futurum*' was a period much more developed in her imagination than the future, that the present was flowing into.

Where was her coadjutor, Richard? Writing notes for papa, and not to be disturbed. She had better have waited tranquilly, but this would not suit her impatience, and she ran up to Margaret's room. There she found a great display of ivy leaves, which Norman, who had been turning half the shops in the town upside down in search of materials, was instructing her to imitate in leather work—a regular mania with him, and apparently the same with Margaret.

In came Ethel. 'Oh! Margaret, will you look at these "First Truths?" Do you think they would be easy enough? Shall I take some of the "Parables" and "Miracles" at once, or content myself with the book about "Jane Sparks?"'

'There's some very easy reading in "Jane Sparks," isn't there? I would not make the little books from the New Testament too common.'

'Take care, that leaf has five points,' said Norman.

'Shall I bring you up "Jane Sparks" to see? Because then you can judge,' said Ethel.

'There, Norman, is that right?—what a beauty! I should like to look over them by-and-by, dear Ethel, very much.'

Ethel gazed and went away, more put out than was usual with her. 'When Margaret has a new kind of fancy work,' she thought, 'she cares for nothing else! as if my poor children did not signify more than trumpery leather leaves!' She next met Flora.

'O Flora, see here, what a famous parcel of books Mr. Wilmot has sent us to choose from.'

'All those!' said Flora, turning them over as they lay heaped on the drawing-room sofa; 'what a confusion!'

'See, such a parcel of reading books. I want to know what you think of setting them up with "Jane Sparks," as it is week-day teaching.'

'You will be very tired of hearing those spelt over for ever; they have some nicer books at the national school.'

'What is the name of them? Do you see any of them here?'

'No, I don't think I do, but I can't wait to look now. I must write some letters. You had better put them together a little. If you were to sort them, you would know what is there. Now, what a mess they are in.'

Ethel could not deny it, and began to deal them out in piles looking somewhat more fitting, but still felt neglected and aggrieved

at no one being at leisure but Harry, who was not likely to be of any use to her.

Presently she heard the study door open, and hoped ; but though it was Richard who entered the room, he was followed by Tom, and each held various books that boded little good to her. Miss Winter had, much to her own satisfaction, been relieved from the charge of Tom, whose lessons Richard had taken upon himself ; and thus Ethel had heard so little about them for a long time past, that even in her vexation and desire to have them over, she listened with interest, desirous to judge what sort of place Tom might be likely to take in school.

She did not perceive that this made Richard nervous and uneasy. He had a great dislike to spectators of Latin lessons ; he never had forgotten an unlucky occasion, some years back, when his father was examining him in the Georgics, and he, dull by nature, and duller by confusion and timidity, had gone on rendering word for word—*enim* for, *seges* a crop, *lini* of mud, *urit* burns, *campum* the field, *avenæ* a crop of pipe, *urit* burns it, when Norman and Ethel had first warned him of the beauty of his translation by an explosion of laughing, when his father had shut the book with a bounce, shaken his head in utter despair, and told him to give up all thoughts of doing anything—and when Margaret had cried with vexation. Since that time, he had never been happy when anyone was in ear-shot of a lesson ; but to-day he had no escape—Harry lay on the rug reading, and Ethel sat forlorn over her books on the sofa. Tom, however, was bright enough, declined his Greek nouns irreproachably, and construed his Latin so well, that Ethel could not help putting in a word or two of commendation, and auguring the third form. ‘Do let him off the parsing, Ritchie,’ said she coaxingly—‘he has said it so well, and I want you so much.’

‘I am afraid I must not,’ said Richard ; who, to her surprise, did not look pleased or satisfied with the prosperous translation ; ‘but come, Tom, you shan’t have many words, if you really know them.’

Tom twisted and looked rather cross, but when asked to parse the word *viribus*, answered readily and correctly.

‘Very well, only two more—*affuit* ?’

‘Third person singular, præter perfect tense of the verb *affo*, *affis*, *affui*, *affere*,’ gabbled off Tom with such confidence, that though Ethel gave an indignant jump, Richard was almost startled into letting it pass, and disbelieving himself. He remonstrated in a somewhat hesitating voice. ‘Did you find that in the dictionary, said he, ‘I thought *affui* came from *adsum*.’

‘O to be sure, stupid fool of a word, so it does!’ said Tom hastily. ‘I had forgot—*adsum*, *ades*, *affui*, *adesse*.’

Richard said no more, but proposed the word *oppositus*.

‘Adjective.’

Ethel was surprised, for she remembered that it was, in this passage, part of a passive verb, which Tom had construed correctly, 'it was objected,' and she had thought this very creditable to him, whereas he now evidently took it for *opposite*; however, on Richard's reading the line, he corrected himself and called it a participle, but did not commit himself further, till asked for its derivation.

'From *oppositor*.'

'Hallo!' cried Harry, who hitherto had been abstracted in his book, but now turned, raised himself on his elbow, and, at the blunder, shook his thick yellow locks, and showed his teeth like a young lion.

'No, now, Tom, pay attention,' said Richard, resignedly. 'If you found out its meaning, you must have seen its derivation.'

'*Oppositus*,' said Tom, twisting his fingers, and gazing first at Ethel, then at Harry, in hopes of being prompted, then at the ceiling and floor, the while he drawled out the word with a whine 'why, *oppositus* from *op-posor*.'

'A poser! aint it?' said Harry.

'Don't, Harry, you distract him,' said Richard. 'Come, Tom, say at once whether you know it or not—it is of no use to invent.'

'From *op*—' and a mumble.

'What? I don't hear—*op*—'

Tom again looked for help to Harry, who made a mischievous movement of his lips, as if prompting, and, deceived by it, he said boldly, 'From *op-possum*.'

'That's right! let us hear him decline it!' cried Harry, in an ecstasy, '*Oppossum, opottis, opposse, or oh-pottery!*'

'Harry,' said Richard, in a gentle reasonable voice, 'I wish you would be so kind as not to stay, if you cannot help distracting him.'

And Harry, who really had a tolerable share of forbearance and consideration, actually obeyed, contenting himself with tossing his book into the air and catching it again, while he paused at the door to give his last unsolicited assistance. 'Decline *oppossum*, you say. I'll tell you how: *O-possum re-poses* up a gum tree. *O-pot-you-I* will, says the *O-posse* of Yankees, come out to *ketch* him. *Opossum* poses them and declines in *O-pot-esse* by any manner of means of *o-potting-di-do-dum*, was quite *oppositum-oppositu*, in fact, quite *contrairy*.'

Richard, with the gravity of a victim, heard this sally of school-boy wit, which threw Ethel back on the sofa in fits of laughing, and declaring that the *Opossum* declined, not that he was declined; but, in the midst of the disturbance thus created, Tom stepped up to her, and whispered, 'Do tell me, Ethel.'

'Indeed I shan't,' said she. 'Why don't you say fairly if you don't know?'

He was obliged to confess his ignorance, and Richard made him

conjugate the whole verb *opponor* from beginning to end, in which he wanted a good deal of help.

Ethel could not help saying, 'How did you find out the meaning of that word, Tom, if you didn't look out the verb?'

'I—don't know,' drawled Tom, in the voice, half sullen, half piteous, which he always assumed when out of sorts.

'It is very odd,' she said, decidedly; but Richard took no notice, and proceeded to the other lessons, which went off tolerably well, except the arithmetic, where there was some great misunderstanding into which Ethel did not enter for some time. When she did attend, she perceived that Tom had brought a right answer, without understanding the working of the sum, and that Richard was putting him through it. She began to be worked into a state of dismay and indignation at Tom's behaviour, and Richard's calm indifference, which made her almost forget Jane Sparks, and long to be alone with Richard; but all the world kept coming into the room, and going out, and she could not say what was in her mind till after dinner, when, seeing Richard go up into Margaret's room, she ran after him, and entering it, surprised Margaret, by not beginning on her books, but saying at once, 'Ritchie, I wanted to speak to you about Tom. I am sure he shuffled about those lessons.'

'I am afraid he does,' said Richard, much concerned.

'What, do you mean that it is often so?'

'Much too often,' said Richard; 'but I have never been able to detect him; he is very sharp, and has some underhand way of preparing his lessons that I cannot make out.'

'Did you know it, Margaret?' said Ethel, astonished not to see her sister looked shocked as well as sorry.

'Yes,' said Margaret, 'Ritchie and I have often talked it over, and tried to think what was to be done.'

'Dear me! why don't you tell papa? It is such a terrible thing!'

'So it is,' said Margaret, 'but we have nothing positive or tangible to accuse Tom of; we don't know what he does, and have never caught him out.'

'I am sure he must have found out the meaning of that *oppositum* in some wrong way—if he had looked it out, he would only have found opposite. Nothing but *opponor* could have shown him the rendering which he made.'

'That's like what I have said almost every day,' said Richard, 'but there we are—I can't get any further.'

'Perhaps he guesses by the context,' said Margaret

'It would be impossible to do so always,' said both the Latin scholars at once.

'Well, I can't think how you can take it so quietly,' said Ethel.

I would have told papa the first moment, and put a stop to it. I gave a great mind to do so if you won't.'

'Ethel, Ethel, that would never do!' exclaimed Margaret, 'pray

don't. Papa would be so dreadfully grieved and angry with poor Tom.'

'Well, so he deserves,' said Ethel.

'You don't know what it is to see papa angry,' said Richard.

'Dear me, Richard!' cried Ethel, who thought she knew pretty well what his sharp words were. 'I'm sure papa never was angry with me, without making me love him more, and, at least, *want* to be better.'

'You are a girl,' said Richard.

'You are higher spirited, and shake off things faster,' said Margaret.

'Why, what do you think he would do to Tom?'

'I think he would be so very angry, that Tom, who, you know, is timid and meek, would be dreadfully frightened,' said Richard.

'That's just what he ought to be, frightened out of these tricks.'

'I am afraid it would frighten him into them still more,' said Richard, 'and perhaps give him such a dread of my father as would prevent him from ever being open with him.'

'Besides, it would make papa so very unhappy,' added Margaret. 'Of course, if poor dear Tom had been found out in any positive deceit, we ought to mention it at once, and let him be punished; but while it is all vague suspicion, and of what papa has such a horror of, it would only grieve him, and make him constantly anxious, without, perhaps, doing Tom any good.'

'I think all that is expediency,' said Ethel, in her bluff, abrupt way.

'Besides,' said Richard, 'we have nothing positive to accuse him of, and if we had, it would be of no use. He will be at school in three weeks, and there he would be sure to shirk, even if he left it off here. Everyone does, and thinks nothing of it.'

'Richard!' cried both sisters, shocked. 'You never did?'

'No, we didn't, but most others do, and not bad fellows either. It is not the way of boys to think much of those things.'

'It is mean—it is dishonourable—it is deceitful!' cried Ethel.

'I know it is very wrong, but you'll never get the general run of boys to think so,' said Richard.

'Then Tom ought not to go to school at all till he is well armed against it,' said Ethel.

'That can't be helped,' said Richard. 'He will get clear of it in time, when he knows better.'

'I will talk to him,' said Margaret, 'and indeed, I think it would be better than worrying papa.'

'Well,' said Ethel, 'of course I shan't tell, because it is not my business, but I think papa ought to know everything about us, and I don't like your keeping anything back. It is being almost as bad as Tom himself.'

With which words, as Flora entered, Ethel marched out of the

room in displeasure, and went down, resolved to settle Jane Sparks by herself.

'Ethel is out of sorts to-day,' said Flora. 'What's the matter?'

'We have had a discussion,' said Margaret. 'She has been terribly shocked by finding out what we have often thought about poor little Tom, and she thinks we ought to tell papa. Her principle is quite right, but I doubt—'

'I know exactly how Ethel would do it!' cried Flora; 'blurt out all on a sudden, "Papa, Tom cheats at his lessons!" then there would be a tremendous uproar, papa would scold Tom till he almost frightened him out of his wits, and then find out it was only suspicion.'

'And never have any comfort again,' said Margaret. 'He would always dread that Tom was deceiving him, and then think it was all for want of— O no, it will never do to speak of it, unless we find out some positive piece of misbehaviour.'

'Certainly,' said Flora.

'And it would do Tom no good to make him afraid of papa,' said Richard.

'Ethel's rule is right in principle,' said Margaret, thoughtfully, 'that papa ought to know all without reserve, and yet it will hardly do in practice. One must use discretion, and not tease him about every little thing. He takes them so much to heart, that he would be almost distracted; and with so much business abroad, I think, at home, he should have nothing but rest, and, as far as we can, freedom from care and worry. Anything wrong about the children brings on *the* grief so much, that I cannot bear to mention it.'

Richard and Flora agreed with her, admiring the spirit which made her, in her weakness and helplessness, bear the whole burthen of family cares alone, and devote herself entirely to spare her father. He was, indeed, her first object, and she would have sacrificed anything to give him ease of mind; but, perhaps, she regarded him more as a charge of her own, than as, in very truth, the head of the family. She had the government in her hands, and had never been used to see him exercise it much in detail (she did not know how much her mother had referred to him in private), and had succeeded to her authority at a time when his health and spirits were in such a state as to make it doubly needful to spare him. It was no wonder that she sometimes carried her consideration beyond what was strictly right, and forgot that he was the real authority, more especially as his impulsive nature sometimes carried him away, and his sound judgment was not certain to come into play at the first moment, so that it required some moral courage to excite displeasure, so easy of manifestation; and of such courage there was, perhaps, a deficiency in her character. Nor had she yet detected her own satisfaction in being the first with everyone in the family.

Ethel was put out, as Flora had discovered, and when she was

down stairs she found it out, and accused herself of having been cross to Margaret, and unkind to Tom—of wishing to be a tell-tale. But still, though displeased with herself, she was dissatisfied with Margaret; it might be right, but it did not agree with her notions. She wanted to see everyone uncompromising, as girls of fifteen generally do; she had an intense disgust and loathing of underhand ways, could not bear to think of Tom's carrying them on, and going to a place of temptation with them uncorrected; and she looked up to her father with a reverence and enthusiasm of one like minded.

She was vexed on another score. Norman came home from Abbotstoke Grange without having seen Miss Rivers, but with a fresh basket of choice flowers, rapturous descriptions of Mr. Rivers' prints, and a present of an engraving, in shading, such as to give the effect of a cast, of a very fine head of Alexander. Nothing was to be thought of but a frame for this—olive, bay, laurel, everything appropriate to the conqueror. Margaret and Norman were engrossed in the subject, and, to Ethel, who had no toleration for fancy work, who expected everything to be either useful or intellectual, this seemed very frivolous. She heard her father say how glad he was to see Norman interested and occupied, and certainly, though it was only in leather leaves, it was better than drooping and attending to nothing. She knew, too, that Margaret did it for his sake, but, said Ethel to herself, 'It was very odd that people should find amusement in such things. Margaret always had a turn for them, but it was very strange in Norman.'

Then came the pang of finding out that this was aggravated by the neglect of herself; she called it all selfishness, and felt that she had had an uncomfortable, unsatisfactory day, with everything going wrong.



CHAPTER XVII.

Gently supported by the ready aid
Of loving hands, whose little work of toil
Her grateful prodigality repaid
With all the benediction of her smile,
She turned her falling feet
To the softly cushioned seat,
Dispensing kindly greetings all the time.'

R. M. MILNES.

THREE great events signalized the month of January. The first was, the opening of the school at Cocks Moor, whither a cart transported half-a-dozen forms, various books, and three dozen plum-buns, Margaret's contribution, in order that the school might begin with éclat. There walked Mr. Wilmot, Richard, and Flora, with Mary, in a jumping capering state of delight, and Ethel, not knowing whether she rejoiced. She kept apart from the rest, and hardly

spoke, for this long probation had impressed her with a sense of responsibility, and she knew that it was a great work to which she had set her hand—a work in which she must persevere, and in which she could not succeed in her own strength.

She took hold of Flora's hand, and squeezed it hard, in a fit of shyness, when they came upon the hamlet, and saw the children watching for them; and when they reached the house, she would fain have shrank into nothing; there was a swelling of heart that seemed to overwhelm and stifle her, and the effect of which was to keep her standing unhelpful, when the others were busy bringing in the benches and settling the room.

It was a tidy room, but it seemed very small when they ranged the benches, and opened the door to the seven-and-twenty children, and the four or five women who stood waiting. Ethel felt some dismay when they all came pushing in, without order or civility, and would have been utterly at a loss what to do with her scholars now she had got them, if Richard and Flora had not marshalled them to the benches.

Rough heads, torn garments, staring vacant eyes, and mouths gaping in shy rudeness—it was a sight to disenchant her of visions of pleasure in the work she had set herself. It was well that she had not to take the initiative.

Mr. Wilmot said a few simple words to the mothers about the wish to teach their children what was right, and to do the best at present practicable; and then told the children that he hoped they would take pains to be good, and mind what they were taught. Then he desired all to kneel down; he said the Collect, 'Prevent us, O Lord, in all our doings—' and then the Lord's prayer.

Ethel felt as if she could bear it better, and was more up to the work after this. Next, the children were desired to stand round the room, and Mr. Wilmot tried who could say the catechism—the two biggest, a boy and a girl, had not an idea of it, and the boy looked foolish, and grinned at being asked what was his name. One child was tolerably perfect, and about half-a-dozen had some dim notions. Three were entirely ignorant of the Lord's prayer, and many of the others did not by any means pronounce the words of it. Jane and Fanny Taylor, Rebekah Watts, and Mrs. Green's little boy, were the only ones who, by their own account, used morning and evening prayers, though, on further examination, it appeared that Polly and Jenny Hall, and some others were accustomed to repeat the old rhyme about 'Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John,' and Una M'Carthy and her little brother Fergus said something that nobody could make out, but which Mr. Wilmot thought had once been an 'Ave Maria.'

Some few of the children could read, and several more knew their letters. The least ignorant were selected to form a first-class, and Mr. Wilmot promised a Prayer-book to the first who should be able to repeat the catechism without a mistake, and a Bible to the first who could read a chapter in it.

Then followed a setting of tasks, varying from a verse of a psalm, or the first answer in the catechism, down to the distinction between A, B, and C; all to be ready by next Tuesday, when, weather permitting, a second lesson was to be given. Afterwards, a piece of advice of Margaret's was followed, and Flora read aloud to the assembly the story of 'Margaret Fletcher.' To some this seemed to give great satisfaction, especially to Una, but Ethel was surprised to see that many, and those not only little ones, talked and yawned. They had no power of attention even to a story, and the stillness was irksome to such wild colts. It was plain that it was time to leave off, and there was no capacity there which did not find the conclusion agreeable, when the basket was opened, and Ethel and Mary distributed the buns, with instructions to say 'thank you.'

The next Tuesday, *some* of the lessons were learnt, Una's perfectly; the big ignorant boy came no more; and some of the children had learnt to behave better, while others behaved worse; Ethel began to know what she was about; Richard's gentleness was eminently successful with the little girls, impressing good manners on them in a marvellous way; and Mary's importance and happiness with alphabet scholars, some bigger than herself, were edifying. Cocksnoor was fairly launched.

The next memorable day was that of Margaret's being first carried down stairs. She had been too willing to put it off as long as she could, dreading to witness the change below stairs, and feeling too, that in entering on the family room, without power of leaving it, she was losing all quiet and solitude, as well as giving up that monopoly of her father in his evenings, which had been her great privilege.

However, she tried to talk herself into liking it; and was rewarded by the happy commotion it caused, though Dr. May was in a state of excitement and nervousness at the prospect of seeing her on the stairs, and his attempts to conceal it only made it worse, till Margaret knew she should be nervous herself, and wished him out of sight and out of the house till it was over, for without him she had full confidence in the coolness and steadiness of Richard, and by him it was safely and quietly accomplished. She was landed on the sofa, Richard and Flora settling her, and the others crowding round and exclaiming, while the newness of the scene and the change gave her a sense of confusion, and she shut her eyes to recover her thoughts, but opened them the next instant at her father's exclamation that she was overcome, smiled to reassure him, and declared herself not tired, and to be very glad to be among them again. But the bustle was oppressive, and her cheerful manner was an effort; she longed to see them all gone, and Flora found it out, sent the children for their walk, and carried off Ethel and the brothers.

Dr. May was called out of the room at the same time, and she was left alone. She gazed round her, at the room where, four months before, she had seen her mother with the babe in her arms,

the children clustered round her, her father exulting in his hen-and-chicken daisies, herself full of bright undefined hope, radiant with health and activity, and her one trouble such that she now knew the force of her mother's words, that it only proved her happiness. It was not till that moment that Margaret realized the change; she found her eyes filling with tears, as she looked round, and saw the familiar furniture and ornaments.

They were instantly checked as she heard her father returning, but not so that he did not perceive them, and exclaim that it had been too much for her. 'O no—it was only the first time,' said Margaret, losing the sense of the painful vacancy in her absorbing desire not to distress her father, and thinking only of him as she watched him standing for some minutes leaning on the mantel-shelf, with his hand shading his forehead.

She began to speak as soon as she thought he was ready to have his mind turned away: 'How nicely Ritchie managed! He carried me so comfortably and easy. It is enough to spoil me to be so deftly waited on.'

'I'm glad of it,' said Dr. May; 'I am sure the change is better for you;' but he came and looked at her still with great solicitude.

'Ritchie can take excellent care of me,' she continued, most anxious to divert his thoughts. 'You see it will do very well indeed for you to take Harry to school.'

'I should like to do so. I should like to see his master, and to take Norman with me,' said the Doctor. 'It would be just the thing for him now—we would show him the dockyard, and all those matters, and such a thorough holiday would set him up again.'

'He is very much better.'

'Much better—he is recovering spirits and tone very fast. That leaf-work of yours came at a lucky time. I like to see him looking out for a curious fern in the hedge-rows—the pursuit has quite brightened him up.'

'And he does it so thoroughly,' said Margaret. 'Ethel fancies it is rather frivolous of him, I believe; but it amuses me to see how men give dignity to what women make trifling. He *will* know everything about the leaves, hunts up my botany books, and has taught me a hundred times more of the construction and wonders of them than I ever learnt.'

'Aye,' said the Doctor, 'he has been talking a good deal to me about vegetable chemistry. He would make a good scientific botanist, if he were to be nothing else. I should be glad if he sticks to it as a pursuit—'tis pretty work, and I should like to have gone further with it, if I had ever had time for it.'

'I dare say he will,' said Margaret. 'It will be very pleasant if he can go with you. How he would enjoy the British Museum, if there was time for him to see it! Have you said anything to him yet?'

No; I waited to see how you were, as it all depends on that.

‘I think it depends still more on something else; whether Norman is as fit to take care of you as Richard is.’

‘That’s another point. There’s nothing but what he could manage now, but I don’t like saying anything to him. I know he would undertake anything I wished, without a word, and then, perhaps, dwell on it in fancy, and force himself, till it would turn to a perfect misery, and upset his nerves again. I’m sorry for it. I meant him to have followed my trade, but he’ll never do for that. However, he has wits enough to make himself what he pleases, and I dare say he will keep at the head of the school after all.’

‘How very good he has been in refraining from restlessness!’

‘It’s beautiful!’ said Dr. May, with strong emotion. ‘Poor boy! I trust he’ll not be disappointed, and I don’t think he will; but I’ve promised him I won’t be annoyed if he should lose his place—so we must take especial care not to show any anxiety. However, for this matter, Margaret, I wish you would sound him, and see whether it would be more pleasure or pain. Only mind you don’t let him think that I shall be vexed, if he feels that he can’t make up his mind; I would not have him fancy that for more than I can tell.’

This consultation revived the spirits of both; and the others returning, found Margaret quite disposed for companionship. If to her the evening was sad and strange, like a visit in a dream to some old familiar haunt, finding all unnatural, to the rest it was delightful. The room was no longer dreary, now that there was a centre for care and attentions, and the party was no longer broken up—the sense of comfort, cheerfulness, and home-gathering had returned, and the pleasant evening household gossip went round the table almost as it used to do. Dr. May resumed his old habit of skimming a club book, and imparting the cream to the listeners; and Flora gave them some music, a great treat to Margaret, who had long only heard its distant sounds.

Margaret found an opportunity of talking to Norman, and judged favourably. He was much pleased at the prospect of the journey, and of seeing a ship, so as to have a clearer notion of the scene where Harry’s life was to be spent, and though the charge of the arm was a drawback, he did not treat it as insurmountable.

A few days’ attendance in his father’s room gave him confidence in taking Richard’s place, and, accordingly, the third important measure was decided on, namely, that he and his father should accompany Harry to the naval school, and be absent three nights. Some relations would be glad to receive them in London, and Alan Ernescliffe, who was studying steam navigation at Woolwich, volunteered to meet them, and go with them to Portsmouth.

It was a wonderful event; Norman and Harry had never been beyond Whiteford in their lives, and none of the young ones could

recollect their papa's ever going from home for more than one night. Dr. May laughed at Margaret for her anxiety and excitement on the subject, and was more amused at overhearing Richard's precise directions to Norman over the packing up.

'Aye, Ritchie,' said the Doctor, as he saw his portmanteau locked, and the key given to Norman, 'you may well look grave upon it. You won't see it look so tidy when it comes back again, and I believe you are thinking it will be lucky if you see it at all.'

There was a very affectionate leave-taking of Harry, who, growing rather soft-hearted, thought it needful to be disdainful, scolded Mary and Blanche for 'lugging off his figure-head,' and assured them they made as much work about it as if he was going to sea at once. Then, to put an end to any more embraces, he marched off to the station with Tom, and nearly caused the others to be too late, by the search for him that ensued.

In due time, Dr. May and Norman returned, looking the better for the journey. There was, first, to tell of Harry's school and its master, and Alan Ernescliffe's introduction of him to a nice-looking boy of his own age; then they were eloquent on the wonders of the dockyard, the Victory, the block machinery. And London—while Dr. May went to transact some business, Norman had been with Alan at the British Museum, and though he had intended to see half London besides, there was no tearing him away from the Elgin marbles; and nothing would serve him, but bringing Dr. May the next morning to visit the Ninevite bulls. Norman further said, that whereas papa could never go out of his house without meeting people who had something to say to him, it was the same elsewhere. Six acquaintances he had met unexpectedly in London, and two at Portsmouth.

So the conversation went on all the evening, to the great delight of all. It was more about things than people, though Flora inquired after Mr. Ernescliffe, and was told he had met them at the station, had been everywhere with them, and had dined at Mackenzies' each day. 'How was he looking?' Ethel asked; and was told prettily much the same as when he went away; and, on a further query from Flora, it appeared that an old naval friend of his father's had hopes of a ship, and had promised to have him with him, and thereupon warm hopes were expressed that Harry might have a berth in the same.

'And when is he coming here again, papa?' said Ethel.

'Eh! oh! I can't tell. I say, isn't it high time to ring?'

When they went up at night, everyone felt that half the say had not been said, and there were fresh beginnings on the stairs. Norman triumphantly gave the key to Richard, and then called to Ethel; 'I say, won't you come into my room while I unpack?'

'O yes, I should like it very much.'

Ethel sat on the bed rolled up in a cloak, while Norman undid

his bag, announcing at the same time: 'Well, Ethel, papa says I may get to my Euripides to-morrow, if I please, and only work an hour at a time!'

'O I am so glad. Then he thinks you quite well?

Yes, I am quite well. I hope I've done with nonsense.'

And how did you get on with his arm?'

'Very well—he was so patient, and told me how to manage. You heard that Sir Matthew said it had got much better in these few weeks. O here it is! There's a present for you.'

'O, thank you. From you, or from papa?'

'This is mine. Papa has a present for everyone in his bag. He said, at last, that a man with eleven children hadn't need go to London very often.'

'And you got this beautiful Lyra Innocentium for me. How very kind of you, Norman. It is just what I wished for. Such lovely binding—and those embossed edges to the leaves. Oh! they make a pattern as they open! I never saw anything like it.'

'I saw such a one on Miss Rivers's table, and asked Ernescliffe where to get one like it. See here's what my father gave me.'

'Bishop Ken's Manual. That is in readiness for the Confirmation.'

'Look! I begged him to put my name, though he said it was a pity to do it with his left hand; I didn't like to wait, so I asked him at least to write N. W. May, and the date.'

'And he has added Prov. xxiii. 24, 25. Let me look it out.' She did so, and instead of reading it aloud, looked at Norman full of congratulation.

'How it ought to make one—' and there Norman broke off from the fulness of his heart.

'I'm glad he put both verses,' said Ethel, presently. 'How pleased with you he must be!'

A silence while brother and sister both gazed intently at the crooked characters, till at last Ethel, with a long breath, resumed her ordinary tone, and said, 'How well he has come to write with his left hand now.'

'Yes. Did you know that he wrote himself to tell Ernescliffe Sir Matthew's opinion of Margaret?'

'No: did he?'

'Do you know, Ethel, said Norman, as he knelt on the floor, and tumbled miscellaneous articles out of his bag, 'it is my belief that Ernescliffe is in love with her, and that papa thinks so.'

'Dear me!' cried Ethel, starting up. 'That is famous. We should always have Margaret at home when he goes to sea!'

'But mind, Ethel, for your life you must not say one word to any living creature.'

'O no, I promise you I won't, Norman, if you'll only tell me how you found it out.'

'What first put it in my head was the first evening, while I was undoing the portmanteau; my father leant on the mantel-shelf, and sighed and muttered, 'Poor Ernescliffe! I wish it may end well.' I thought he forgot that I was there, so I would not seem to notice, but I soon saw it was *that* he meant.'

'How?' cried Ethel, eagerly.

'O, I don't know—by Alan's way.'

'Tell me—I want to know what people do when they are in love.'

'Nothing particular,' said Norman, smiling.

'Did you hear him inquire for her? How did he look?'

'I can't tell. That was when he met us at the station before I thought of it, and I had to see to the luggage. But I'll tell you one thing, Ethel; when papa was talking of her to Mrs. Mackenzie, at the other end of the room, all his attention went away in an instant from what he was saying. And once, when Harry said something to me about her, he started, and looked round so earnestly.'

'O yes—that's like people in books. And did he colour?'

'No; I don't recollect that he did,' said Norman; 'but I observed he never asked directly after her if he could help it, but always was trying to lead, in some roundabout way, to hearing what she was doing.'

'Did he call her Margaret?'

'I watched; but to me he always said, "Your sister," and if he had to speak of her to papa, he said, "Miss May." And then you should have seen his attention to papa. I could hardly get a chance of doing anything for papa.'

'O I am sure of it!' cried Ethel, clasping her hands. 'But, poor man, how unhappy he must have been at having to go away when she was so ill!'

'Aye, the last time he saw her was when he carried her up-stairs.'

'O dear! I hope he will soon come here again!'

'I don't suppose he will. Papa did not ask him.'

'Dear me, Norman! Why not? Isn't papa very fond of him? Why shouldn't he come?'

'Don't you see, Ethel, that would be of no use while poor Margaret is no better. If he gained her affections, it would only make her unhappy.'

'O, but she is much better. She can raise herself up now without help, and sat up ever so long this morning, without leaning back on her cushions. She is getting well—you know Sir Matthew said she would.'

'Yes; but I suppose papa thinks they had better say nothing till she is quite well.'

'And when she is! How famous it will be!'

'Then there's another thing; he is very poor, you know.'

'I am sure papa does not care about people being rich.'

‘I suppose Alan thinks he ought not to marry, unless he could make his wife comfortable.’

‘Look here—it would be all very easy: she should stay with us, and be comfortable here, and he go to sea, and get lots of prize money.’

‘And that’s what you call domestic felicity!’ said Norman laughing.

‘He might have her when he was at home,’ said Ethel.

‘No, no; that would never do,’ said Norman. ‘Do you think Ernescliffe is a man that would marry a wife for her father to maintain her?’

‘Why, papa would like it very much. He is not a mercenary father in a book.’

‘Hey! what’s that?’ said a voice, Ethel little expected. ‘Contraband talk at contraband times? What’s this!’

‘Did you hear, papa?’ said Ethel, looking down.

‘Only your last words, as I came up to ask Norman what he had done with my pocket-book. Mind, I ask no impertinent questions; but, if you have no objection, I should like to know what gained me the honour of that compliment.’

‘Norman?’ said Ethel, interrogatively, and blushing in emulation of her brother, who was crimson.

‘I’ll find it,’ said he, rushing off with a sort of nod and sign, that conveyed to Ethel that there was no help for it.

So, with much confusion, she whispered into her papa’s ear that Norman had been telling her something he guessed about Mr. Ernescliffe.

Her father at first smiled, a pleased amused smile. ‘Ah! ha! so Master June has his eyes and ears open, has he? A fine bit of gossip to regale you with on his return!’

‘He told me to say not one word,’ said Ethel.

‘Right—mind you don’t,’ said Dr. May, and Ethel was surprised to see how sorrowful his face became. At the same moment Norman returned, still very red, and said, ‘I’ve put out the pocket-book, papa. I think I should tell you I repeated what, perhaps, you did not mean me to hear—you talked to yourself something of pitying Ernescliffe.’

The Doctor smiled again at the boy’s high-minded openness, which must have cost an effort of self-humiliation. ‘I can’t say *little* pitchers have long ears, to a May-pole like you, Norman,’ said he; ‘I think I ought rather to apologize for having inadvertently tumbled in among your secrets; I assure you I did not come to spy you.’

‘O, no, no, no, *no!*’ repeated Ethel, vehemently. ‘Then you didn’t mind our talking about it?’

‘Of course not, as long as it goes no further. It is the use of sisters, to tell them one’s private sentiments. Is not it, Norman?’

'And do you really think *it* is so, papa?' Ethel could not help whispering.

'I'm afraid it is!' said Dr. May, sighing; then, as he caught her earnest eyes; 'The more I see of Alan, the finer fellow I think him, and the more sorry I am for him. It seems presumptuous, almost wrong, to think of the matter at all while my poor Margaret is in this state; and, if she were well, there are other difficulties which would, perhaps, prevent his speaking, or lead to long years of waiting and wearing out hope.'

'Money!' said Ethel.

'Aye! Though I so far deserve your compliment, Miss, that I should be foolish enough, if she were but well, to give my consent to-morrow, because I could not help it; yet one can't live forty-six years in this world without seeing it is wrong to marry without a reasonable dependence—and there won't be much among eleven of you. It makes my heart ache to think of it, come what may, as far as I can see, and without *her* to judge. The only comfort is, that poor Margaret herself knows nothing of it, and is at peace so far. It will be ordered for them, anyhow. Good night, my dear.'

Ethel sought her room, with graver, deeper thoughts of life than she had carried up stairs.



CHAPTER XVIII.

'Saw ye never in the meadows,
Where your little feet did pass,
Down below, the sweet white daisies
Growing in the long green grass?
Saw you never lilac blossoms,
Or acacia white and red,
Waving brightly in the sunshine,
On the tall trees over head?'

HYMNS FOR CHILDREN, C. F. A.

My dear child, what a storm you have had! how wet you must be! exclaimed Mrs. Larpent, as Meta Rivers came bounding up the broad staircase at Abbotstoke Grange.

'Oh, no; I am quite dry; feel.'

'Are you sure?' said Mrs. Larpent, drawing her darling into a luxurious bed-room, lighted up by a glowing fire, and full of pretty things. 'Here, come and take off your wet things, my dear, and Bellairs shall bring you some tea.'

'I'm dry; I'm warm,' said Meta, tossing off her plummy hat, as she established herself, with her feet on the fender. 'But where do you think I have been? You have so much to hear; but first—three guesses where we were in the rain?'

'In the Stoneborough Cloisters, that you wanted to see? My dear, you did not keep your papa in the cold there?'

‘No no· we never got there at all; guess again.’

‘At Mr. Edward Wilmot’s?’

‘No!’

‘Could it have been at Dr. May’s? Really, then, you must tell me.’

‘There! you deserve a good long story; beginning at the beginning,’ said Meta, clapping her hands, ‘wasn’t it curious? as we were coming up the last hill, we met some girls in deep mourning, with a lady, who looked like their governess. I wondered whether they could be Dr. May’s daughters, and so it turned out they were. Presently there began to fall little square lumps, neither hail, nor snow, nor rain; it grew very cold, and rain came on. It would have been great fun, if I had not been afraid papa would catch cold, and he said we would canter on to the inn. But luckily, there was Dr. May walking up the street, and he begged us to come into his house. I was so glad! We were tolerably wet, and Dr. May said something about hoping the girls were at home; well, when he opened the drawing-room door, there was the poor daughter lying on the sofa.’

‘Poor girl! tell me of her.’

‘Oh! you must go and see her; you won’t look at her without losing your heart. Papa liked her so much—see if he does not talk of her all the evening. She looks the picture of goodness and sweetness. Only think of her having some of the Maidenhair and Cape Jessamine still in water, that we sent her so long ago. She shall have some flowers every three days. Well, Dr. May said, “There is one at least, that is sure to be at home.” She felt my habit, and said I must go and change it, and she called to a little thing of six, telling her to show me the way to Flora. She smiled, and said she wished she could go herself, but Flora would take care of me. Little Blanche came and took hold of my hand, chattering away, up we went, up two staircases, and at the top of the last stood a girl about seventeen, so pretty! such deep blue eyes, and such a complexion! “That’s Flora,” little Blanche said; “Flora, this is Miss Rivers, and she’s wet, and Margaret says you are to take care of her.”’

‘So that was your introduction?’

‘Yes; we got acquainted in a minute. She took me into her room—such a room! I believe Bellairs would be angry if she had such an one; all up in the roof, no fire, no carpet, except little strips by the beds; there were three beds. Flora used to sleep there till Miss May was ill, and now she dresses there. Yet I am sure they are as much ladies as I am’

‘You are an only daughter, my dear, and a petted one,’ said Mrs. Larpent, smiling. ‘There are too many of them to make much of, as we do of our Meta.’

‘I suppose so; but I did not know gentlewomen lived in such a

way,' said Meta. 'There were nice things about, a beautiful inlaid work-box of Flora's, and a rosewood desk, and plenty of books, and a Greek book and dictionary were spread open. I asked Flora if they were hers, and she laughed and said no; and that Ethel would be much discomposed that I had seen them. Ethel keeps up with her brother Norman—only fancy! and he at the head of the school. How clever she must be!'

'But, my dear, were you standing in your wet things all this time!

'No; I was trying on their frocks, but they trailed on the ground upon me, so she asked if I would come and sit by the nursery fire till my habit was dry; and there was the dear little good-humoured baby, so fair and pretty. She is not a bit shy, will go to anybody, but, they say, she likes no one so well as her brother Norman.'

'So you had a regular treat of baby nursing.'

'That I had; I could not part with her, the darling. Flora thought we might take her down, and I liked playing with her in the drawing-room and talking to Miss May, till the fly came to take us home. I wanted to have seen Ethel; but, only think, papa has asked Dr. May to bring Flora some day; how I hope he will!'

Little Meta having told her story, and received plenty of sympathy, proceeded to dress, and, while her maid braided her hair, a musing fit fell upon her. 'I have seen something of life to-day,' thought she. 'I had thought of the great difference between us and the poor, but I did not know ladies lived in such different ways. I should be very miserable without Bellairs, or without a fire in my room. I don't know what I should do if I had to live in that cold, shabby den, and do my own hair, yet they think nothing of it, and they are cultivated and lady-like! Is it all fancy, and being brought up to it? I wonder if it is right? Yet dear papa likes me to have these things, and can afford them. I never knew I was luxurious before, and yet I think I must be! One thing I do wish, and that is, that I was of as much use as those girls. I ought to be. I am a motherless girl like them, and I ought to be everything to papa, just as Miss May is, even lying on the sofa there, and only two years older than I am. I don't think I am of any use at all; he is fond of me, of course, dear papa; and if I died, I don't know what would become of him, but that's only because I am his daughter—he has only George besides to care for. But, really and truly, he would get on as well without me. I never do anything for him, but now and then playing to him in the evening, and that not always, I am afraid, when I want to be about anything else. He is always petting me, and giving me all I want, but I never do anything but my lessons, and going to the school, and the poor people, and that is all pleasure. I have so much that I never miss what I give away. I wonder whether it is all right. Leonora and Agatha have not so much money to do as they please with—they are not so idolized. George said, when he was angry, that papa idolizes me

but they have all these comforts and luxuries, and never think of anything but doing what they like. They never made me consider as these Mays do. I should like to know them more. I do so much want a friend of my own age. It is the only want I have. I have tried to make a friend of Leonora, but I cannot; she never cares for what I do. If she saw these Mays she would look down on them. Dear Mrs. Larpent is better than anyone, but then she is so much older. Flora May shall be my friend. I'll make her call me Meta as soon as she comes. When will it be? The day after to-morrow?

But little Meta watched in vain. Dr. May always came with either Richard or the groom, to drive him, and if Meta met him and hoped he would bring Flora next time, he only answered that Flora would like it very much, and he hoped soon to do so.

The truth was, it was no such every day matter as Meta imagined. The larger carriage had been broken, and the only vehicle held only the doctor—his charioteer—and in a very minute appendage behind, a small son of the gardener, to open the gates, and hold the horse.

The proposal had been one of those general invitations to be fulfilled at any time, and therefore easily set aside; and Dr. May, though continually thinking he should like to take his girls to Abbotstoke, never saw the definite time for so doing; and Flora herself, though charmed with Miss Rivers, and delighted with the prospect of visiting her, only viewed it as a distant prospect.

There was plenty of immediate interest to occupy them at home, to say nothing of the increasing employment that Cocksmoor gave to thoughts, legs, and needles. There was the commencement of the half-year, when Tom's school-boy life was to begin, and when it would be proved whether Norman were able to retain his elevation.

Margaret had much anxiety respecting the little boy about to be sent into a scene of temptation. Her great confidence was in Richard, who told her that boys did many more wrong things than were known at home, and yet turned out very well, and that Tom would be sure to right himself in the end. Richard had been blameless in his whole school course, but though never partaking of the other boys' evil practices, he could not form an independent estimate of character, and his tone had been a little hurt, by sharing the school public opinion of morality. He thought Stoneborough, and its temptations, inevitable, and only wished to make the best of it. Margaret was afraid to harass her father, by laying the case before him. All her brothers had gone safely through the school, and it never occurred to her that it was possible that, if her father knew the bias of Tom's disposition, he might choose, for the present, at least, some other mode of education.

She talked earnestly to Tom, and he listened impatiently. There is an age when boys rebel against female rule, and are not yet softened by the chivalry of manhood, and Tom was at this time of

life. He did not like to be lectured by a sister, secretly disputed her right, and, proud of becoming a schoolboy, had not the generous deference for her weakness felt by his elder brothers; he was all the time peeling a stick, as if to show that he was not attending, and he raised up his shoulder pettishly whenever she came to a mention of the religious duty of sincerity. She did not long continue her advice, and, much disappointed and concerned, tried to console herself with hoping that he might have heeded more than he seemed to do.

He was placed tolerably high in the school, and Norman, who had the first choice of fags, took him instead of Hector Ernescliffe, who had just passed beyond the part of the school liable to be fagged. He said he liked school, looked bright when he came home in the evenings, and the sisters hoped all was right.

Everyone was just now anxiously watching Norman, especially his father, who strove in vain to keep back all manifestation of his earnest desire to see him retain his post. Resolutely did the Doctor refrain from asking any questions when the boys came in, but he could not keep his eyes from studying the face, to see whether it bore marks of mental fatigue, and from following him about the room, to discover whether he found it necessary, as he had done last autumn, to spend the evening in study. It was no small pleasure to see him come in with his hand full of horse-chestnut and hazel-buds, and proceed to fetch the microscope and botany books, throwing himself eagerly into the study of the wonders of their infant forms, searching deeply into them with Margaret, and talking them over with his father, who was very glad to promote the pursuit—one in which he had always taken great interest.

Another night Dr. May was for a moment disturbed by seeing the school-books put out, but Norman had only some notes to compare, and while he did so, he was remarking on Flora's music, and joining in the conversation so freely as to prove it was no labour to him. In truth, he was evidently quite recovered, entirely himself again, except that he was less boyish. He had been very lively and full of merry nonsense; but his ardour for play had gone off with his high spirits, and there was a manliness of manner, and tone of mind, that made him appear above his real age.

At the end of a fortnight he volunteered to tell his father that all was right. 'I am not afraid of not keeping my place,' he said; 'you were quite right, papa. I am more up to my work than I was ever before, and it comes to me quite fresh and pleasant. I don't promise to get the Randall scholarship, if Forder and Cheviot stay on, but I can quite keep up to the mark in school work.'

'That's right,' said Dr. May, much rejoiced. 'Are you sure you do it with ease, and without its haunting you at night?'

'Oh, yes; quite sure. I can't think what has made Dr. Hoxton

set us on in such easy things this time. It is very lucky for me, for one gets so much less time to oneself as dux.'

'What! with keeping order?'

'Aye,' said Norman. 'I fancy they think they may take liberties because I am new and young. I must have my eye in all corners of the hall at once, and do my work by snatches, as I can.'

'Can you make them attend to you?'

'Why, yes, pretty well, when it comes to the point—"will you, or will you not." Cheviot is a great help, too, and has all the weight of being the eldest fellow among us.'

'But still you find it harder work than learning? You had rather have to master the dead language than the live tongues?'

'A pretty deal,' said Norman; then added, 'one knows what to be at with the dead, better than with the living; they don't make parties against one. I don't wonder at it. It was very hard on some of those great fellows to have me set before them, but I do not think it is fair to visit it by putting up the little boys to all sorts of mischief.'

'Shameful!' said the doctor, warmly; 'but never mind, Norman, keep your temper, and do your own duty, and you are man enough to put down such petty spite.'

'I hope I shall manage rightly,' said Norman; 'but I shall be glad if I can get the Randall and get away to Oxford; school is not what it used to be, and if you don't think me too young—'

'No, I don't; certainly not. Trouble has made a man of you, Norman, and you are fitter to be with men than boys. In the meantime, if you can be patient with these fellows, you'll be of great use where you are. If there had been anyone like you at the head of the school in my time, it would have kept me out of no end of scrapes. How does Tom get on? he is not likely to fall into this set I trust.'

'I am not sure,' said Norman; 'he does pretty well on the whole. Some of them began by bullying him, and that made him cling to Cheviot and Ernescliffe, and the better party; but lately I have thought Anderson, junior, rather making up to him, and I don't know whether they don't think that tempting him over to them, would be the surest way of vexing me. I have an eye over him, and I hope he may get settled into the steadier sort before next half.'

After a silence, Norman said; 'Papa, there is a thing I can't settle in my own mind. Suppose there had been wrong things done when older boys, and excellent ones too, were at the head of the school, yet they never interfered, do you think I ought to let it go on?'

'Certainly not, or why is power given to you?'

'So I thought,' said Norman; 'I can't see it otherwise. I wish I could, for it will be horrid to set about it, and they'll think it a regular shame in me to meddle.—O! I know what I came into

the study for ; I want you to be so kind as to lend me your pocket Greek Testament. I gave Harry my little one.'

'You are very welcome. What do you want it for?'

Norman coloured. 'I met with a sermon the other day that recommended reading a bit of it every day, and I thought I should like to try, now the Confirmation is coming. One can always have some quiet by getting away into the cloister.'

'Bless you, my boy! while you go on in this way, I have not much fear but that you'll know how to manage.'

Norman's rapid progress affected another of the household in an unexpected way.

'Margaret, my dear, I wish to speak to you,' said Miss Winter, re-appearing when Margaret thought everyone was gone out walking. She would have said, 'I am very sorry for it'—so ominous was the commencement—and her expectations were fulfilled when Miss Winter had solemnly seated herself, and taken out her netting. 'I wish to speak to you about dear Ethel,' said the governess; 'you know how unwilling I always am to make any complaint, but I cannot be satisfied with her present way of going on.'

'Indeed,' said Margaret. 'I am much grieved to hear this. I thought she had been taking great pains to improve.'

'So she was at one time. I would not by any means wish to deny it, and it is not of her learning that I speak, but of a hurried, careless way of doing everything, and an irritability at being interfered with.'

Margaret knew how Miss Winter often tried Ethel's temper, and was inclined to take her sister's part. 'Ethel's time is so fully occupied,' she said.

'That is the very thing that I was going to observe, my dear. Her time is too much occupied, and my conviction is, that it is hurtful to a girl of her age.'

This was a new idea to Margaret, who was silent, longing to prove Miss Winter wrong, and not have to see poor Ethel pained by having to relinquish any of her cherished pursuits.

'You see there is that Cocks Moor,' said Miss Winter. 'You do not know how far off it is, my dear; much too great a distance for a young girl to be walking continually in all weathers.'

'That's a question for papa,' thought Margaret.

'Besides,' continued Miss Winter, 'those children engross almost all her time and thoughts. She is working for them, preparing lessons, running after them continually. It takes off her whole mind from her proper occupations, unsettles her, and I do think it is beyond what befits a young lady of her age.'

Margaret was silent.

'In addition,' said Miss Winter, 'she is at every spare moment busy with Latin and Greek, and I cannot think that to keep pace with a boy of Norman's age and ability can be desirable for her.'

‘It is a great deal,’ said Margaret, ‘but—’

‘I am convinced that she does more than is right,’ continued Miss Winter. ‘She may not feel any ill effects at present, but you may depend upon it, it will tell on her by-and-by. Besides, she does not attend to anything properly. At one time she was improving in neatness and orderly habits. Now, you surely must have seen how much less tidy her hair and dress have been.’

‘I have thought her hair looking rather rough,’ said Margaret, disconsolately.

‘No wonder,’ said Miss Winter, ‘for Flora and Mary tell me she hardly spends five minutes over it in the morning, and with a book before her the whole time. If I send her up to make it fit to be seen, I meet with looks of annoyance. She leaves her books in all parts of the school-room for Mary to put away, and her table drawer is one mass of confusion. Her lessons she does well enough, I own, though what I should call much too fast; but have you looked at her work lately?’

‘She does not work very well,’ said Margaret, who was at that moment, though Miss Winter did not know it, re-gathering a poor child’s frock that Ethel had galloped through with more haste than good speed.

‘She works a great deal worse than little Blanche,’ said Miss Winter, ‘and though it may not be the fashion to say so in these days, I consider good needlework far more important than accomplishments. Well, then, Margaret, I should wish you only just to look at her writing.’

And Miss Winter opened a French exercise book, certainly containing anything but elegant specimens of penmanship. Ethel’s best writing was an upright, disjointed, niggle, looking more like Greek than anything else, except where here and there it made insane efforts to become running-hand, and thereby lost its sole previous good quality of legibility, while the lines waved about the sheet in almost any direction but the horizontal. The necessity she believed herself under of doing what Harry called writing with the end of her nose, and her always holding her pen with her fingers almost in the ink, added considerably to the difficulty of the performance. This being at her best, the worst may be supposed to be indescribable, when dashed off in a violent hurry, and considerably garnished with blots. Margaret thought she had seen the worst, and was sighing at being able to say nothing for it, when Miss Winter confounded her by turning a leaf, and showing it was possible to make a still wilder combination of scramble, niggle, scratch, and crookedness—and this was supposed to be an amended edition! Miss Winter explained that Ethel had, in an extremely short time, performed an exercise in which no fault could be detected except the writing, which was pronounced to be too atrocious to be shown up to M. Balloprè. On being desired to write

it over again, she had obeyed with a very bad grace, and some murmurs about Cocks Moor, and produced the second specimen, which, in addition to other defects, had some elisions from arrant carelessness, depriving it of its predecessor's merits of being good French.

Miss Winter had been so provoked, that she believed this to be an effect of ill temper, and declared that she should certainly have kept Ethel at home to write it over again, if it had not so happened that Dr. May had proposed to walk part of the way with her and Richard, and the governess was unwilling to bring her into disgrace with him. Margaret was so grateful to her for this forbearance, that it disposed her to listen the more patiently to the same representations put in, what Miss Winter fancied, different forms. Margaret was much perplexed. She could not but see much truth in what Miss Winter said, and yet she could not bear to thwart Ethel, whom she admired with her whole heart; and that dry experience, and prejudiced preciseness, did not seem capable of entering into her sister's thirst for learning and action. When Miss Winter said Ethel would grow up odd, eccentric, and blue, Margaret was ready to answer that she would be superior to everyone; and when the governess urged her to insist on Cocks Moor being given up, she felt impatient of that utter want of sympathy for the good work.

All that evening Margaret longed for a quiet time to reflect, but it never came till she was in bed; and when she had made up her mind how to speak to Ethel, it was five times harder to secure her alone. Even when Margaret had her in the room by herself, she looked wild and eager, and said she could not stay, she had some *Thucydides* to do.

'Won't you stay with me a little while, quietly?' said Margaret, 'we hardly ever have one of our talks.'

'I didn't mean to vex you, dear Margaret. I like nothing so well, only we are never alone, and I've no time.'

'Pray do spare me a minute, Ethel, for I have something that I must say to you, and I am afraid you won't like it—so do listen kindly.'

'Oh!' said Ethel, 'Miss Winter has been talking to you. I know she said she would tell you that she wants me to give up Cocks Moor. You aren't dreaming of it, Margaret!'

'Indeed, dear Ethel, I should be very sorry, but one thing I am sure of, that there is something amiss in your way of going on.'

'Did she show you that horrid exercise?'

'Yes.'

Well, I know it was baddish writing, but just listen, Margaret. We promised six of the children to print them each a verse of a hymn on a card to learn. Ritchie did three, and then could not go on, for the book, that the others were in, was lost till last evening, and then he was writing for papa. So I thought I would do them before we went to Cocks Moor, and that I should squeeze time out

of the morning; but I got a bit of Sophocles that was so horridly hard, it ate up all my time, and I don't understand it properly now; I must get Norman to tell me. And that ran in my head, and made me make a mistake in my sum, and have to begin it again. Then, just as I thought I had saved time over the exercise, comes Miss Winter and tells me I must do it over again, and scolds me, besides, about the ink on my fingers. She would send me up at once to get it off, and I could not find nurse and her bottle of stuff for it, so that wasted ever so much more time, and I was so vexed that, really and truly, my hand shook, and I could not write any better.'

'No, I thought it looked as if you had been in one of your agonies.'

'And she thought I did it on purpose, and that made me angry, and so we got into a dispute, and away went all the little moment I might have had, and I was forced to go to Cocks Moor as a promise breaker!'

'Don't you think you had better have taken pains at first?'

'Well, so I did with the sense, but I hadn't time to look at the writing much.'

'You would have made better speed if you had.'

'Oh! yes, I know I was wrong, but it is a great plague altogether. Really, Margaret, I shan't get Thueydides done.'

'You must wait a little longer, please, Ethel, for I want to say to you that I am afraid you are doing too much, and that prevents you from doing things well, as you were trying to do last autumn.'

'You are not thinking of my not going to Cocks Moor!' cried Ethel, vehemently.

'I want you to consider what is to be done, dear Ethel. You thought, last autumn, a great deal of curing your careless habits, now you seem not to have time to attend. You can do a great deal very fast, I know, but isn't it a pity to be always in a hurry?'

'It isn't Cocks Moor that is the reason,' said Ethel.

'No: you did pretty well when you began, but you know that was in the holidays, when you had no Latin and Greek to do.'

'O but, Margaret, they won't take so much time when I have once got over the difficulties, and see my way, but just now they have put Norman into such a frightfully difficult play, that I can hardly get on at all with it, and there's a new kind of Greek verses, too, and I don't make out from the book how to manage them. Norman showed me on Saturday, but mine won't be right. When I've got over that, I shan't be so hurried.'

'But Norman will go on to something harder, I suppose.'

'I dare say I shall be able to do it.'

'Perhaps you might, but I want you to consider if you are not working beyond what can be good for anybody. You see Norman is much cleverer than most boys, and you are a year younger; and

besides doing all his work at the head of the school, his whole business of the day, you have Cocks Moor to attend to, and your own lessons, besides reading all the books that come into the house. Now isn't that more than is reasonable to expect any head and hands to do properly?'

'But if I can do it?'

'But can you, dear Ethel? Aren't you always racing from one thing to another, doing them by halves, feeling hunted, and then growing vexed?'

'I know I have been cross lately,' said Ethel, 'but it's the being so bothered.'

'And why are you bothered? Isn't it that you undertake too much?'

'What would you have me do?' said Ethel, in an injured, unconvinced voice. 'Not give up my children?'

'No,' said Margaret; 'but don't think me very unkind if I say, suppose you left off trying to keep up with Norman.'

'Oh! Margaret! Margaret!' and her eyes filled with tears. 'We have hardly missed doing the same every day since the first Latin grammar was put into his hands!'

'I know it would be very hard,' said Margaret, but Ethel continued, in a piteous tone, a little sentimental: 'From *hic hæc hoc* up to *Alcaics* and *beta* Thukididou we have gone on together, and I can't bear to give it up. I'm sure I can—'

'Stop, Ethel, I really doubt whether you can. Do you know that Norman was telling papa, the other day, that it was very odd Dr. Hoxton gave them such easy lessons.'

Ethel looked very much mortified.

'You see,' said Margaret, kindly, 'we all know that men have more power than women, and I suppose the time has come for Norman to pass beyond you. He would not be cleverer than anyone, if he could not do more than a girl at home.'

'He has so much more time for it,' said Ethel.

'That's the very thing. Now consider, Ethel. His work, after he goes to Oxford, will be doing his very utmost—and you know what an utmost that is. If you could keep up with him at all, you must give your whole time and thoughts to it, and when you had done so—if you could get all the honours in the University—what would it come to? You can't take a first-class.'

'I don't want one,' said Ethel; 'I only can't bear not to do as Norman does, and I like Greek so much.'

'And for that would you give up being a useful, steady daughter and sister at home? The sort of woman that dear mamma wished to make you, and a comfort to papa.'

Ethel was silent, and large tears were gathering.

'You own that that is the first thing?'

'Yes,' said Ethel, faintly.

‘And that it is what you fail in most?’

‘Yes.’

‘Then, Ethel dearest, when you made up your mind to Cocks-moor, you knew those things could not be done without a sacrifice?’

‘Yes, but I didn’t think it would be this.’

Margaret was wise enough not to press her, and she sat down and sighed pitifully. Presently she said, ‘Margaret, if you would only let me leave off that stupid old French, and horrid dull reading with Miss Winter, I should have plenty of time for everything; and what does one learn by hearing Mary read poetry she can’t understand?’

‘You work, don’t you? But indeed, Ethel, don’t say that I can let you leave off anything. I don’t feel as if I had that authority. If it be done at all, it must be by papa’s consent, and if you wish me to ask him about it, I will, only I think it would vex Miss Winter; and I don’t think dear mamma would have liked Greek and Cocks-moor to swallow up all the little common lady-like things.’

Ethel made two or three great gulps: ‘Margaret, must I give up everything, and forget all my Latin and Greek?’

‘I should think that would be a great pity,’ said Margaret. ‘If you were to give up the verse-making, and the trying to do as much as Norman, and fix some time in the day—half-an-hour, perhaps, for your Greek—I think it might do very well.’

‘Thank you,’ said Ethel, much relieved; ‘I’m glad you don’t want me to leave it all off. I hope Norman won’t be vexed,’ she added, looking a little melancholy.

But Norman had not by any means the sort of sentiment on the subject that she had: ‘Of course, you know, Ethel,’ said he, ‘it must have come to this some time or other, and if you find those verses too hard, and that they take up too much of your time, you had better give them up.’

Ethel did not like anything to be said to be too hard for her, and was very near pleading she only wanted time, but some recollection came across her, and presently she said, ‘I suppose it is a wrong sort of ambition to want to learn more, in one’s own way, when one is told it is not good for one. I was just going to say I hated being a woman, and having these tiresome little trifles—my duty—instead of learning, which is yours, Norman.’

‘I’m glad you did not,’ said Norman, ‘for it would have been very silly of you; and I assure you, Ethel, it is really time for you to stop, or you would get into a regular learned lady, and be good for nothing. I don’t mean that knowing more than other people would make you so, but minding nothing else would.’

This argument from Norman himself, did much to reconcile Ethel’s mind to the sacrifice she had made; and when she went to bed, she tried to work out the question in her own mind, whether

her eagerness for classical learning was a wrong sort of ambition, to know what other girls did not, and whether it was right to crave for more knowledge than was thought advisable for her. She only bewildered herself, and went to sleep before she had settled anything, but that she knew she must make all give way to papa first, and, secondly, to Cocksmoor.

Meanwhile Margaret had told her father what had passed. He was only surprised to hear that Ethel had kept up so long with Norman, and thought that it was quite right that she should not undertake so much, agreeing more entirely than Margaret had expected with Miss Winter's view, that it would be hurtful to body as well as mind.

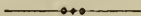
'It is perfectly ridiculous to think of her attempting it!' he said. 'I am glad you have put a stop to it.'

'I am glad I have,' said Margaret; 'and dear Ethel behaved so very well. If she had resisted, it would have puzzled me very much, I must have asked you to settle it. But it is very odd, papa, Ethel is the one of them all who treats me most as if I had real authority over her; she lets me scold her, asks my leave, never seems to recollect for a moment how little older I am, and how much cleverer she is. I am sure I never should have submitted so readily. And that always makes it more difficult to me to direct her; I don't like to take upon me with her, because it seems wrong to have her obeying me, as if she were a mere child.'

'She is a fine creature,' said Dr. May, emphatically. 'It just shows the fact, the higher the mind, the readier the submission. But you don't mean that you have any difficulty with the others?'

'O no, no. Flora never could need any interference, especially from me, and Mary is a thorough good girl. I only meant that Ethel lays herself out to be ruled in quite a remarkable way. I am sure, though she does love learning, her real love is for goodness, and for you, papa.'

Ethel would have thought her sacrifice well paid for, had she seen her father's look of mournful pleasure.



CHAPTER XIX.

'O ruthless scene! when from a nook obscure,
His little sister doth his peril see,
All playful as she sate, she grows demure,
She finds full soon her wonted spirits flee,
She meditates a prayer to set him free.'

SHENSTONE.

THE setting sun shone into the great west window of the school at Stoneborough, on its bare walls, the master's desks, the forms polished with use, and the square, inky, hacked and hewed chests, carved with the names of many generations of boys.

About six or eight little boys were clearing away the books or papers that they, or those who owned them as fags, had left astray, and a good deal of talk and laughing was going on among them. 'Ha!' exclaimed one, 'here has Harrison left his book behind him that he was showing us the gladiators in!' and, standing by the third master's desk, he turned over a page or two of Smith's Antiquities, exclaiming, 'It is full of pictures—here's an old man blowing the bellows—'

'Let me see!' cried Tom May, precipitating himself across the benches and over the desk, with so little caution, that there was an outcry; and, to his horror, he beheld the ink spilled over Mr. Harrison's book, while 'There, August! you've been and done it!' 'You'll catch it!' resounded on all sides.

'What good will staring with your mouth open do!' exclaimed Edward Anderson, the eldest present. 'Here! a bit of blotting paper this moment!'

Tom, dreadfully frightened, handed a sheet torn from an old paper-case that he had inherited from Harry, saying despairingly, 'It won't take it out, will it?'

'No, little stupid head, but don't you see, I'm stopping it from running down the edges, or soaking in. He won't be the wiser till he opens it again at that place.'

'When he does, he will,' said the bewildered Tom.

'Let him. It won't tell tales.'

'He's coming!' cried another boy, 'he is close at the door.'

Anderson hastily shut the book over the blotting-paper, which he did not venture to retain in his hand, dragged Tom down from the desk, and was apparently entirely occupied with arranging his own box, when Mr. Harrison came in. Tom crouched behind the raised lid, quaking in every limb, conscious he ought to confess, but destitute of resolution to do so, and, in a perfect agony as the master went to the desk, took up the book, and carried it away, so unconscious, that Larkins, a great wag, only waited till his back was turned, to exclaim, 'Ha! old fellow, you don't know what you've got there!'

'Hollo! May junior, will you never leave off staring?' you won't see a bit further for it,' said Edward Anderson, shaking him by the ear; 'come to your senses and know your friends.'

'He'll open it!' gasped Tom.

'So he will, but I'd bet ninety to one, it is not at that page, or if he does, it won't tell tales, unless, indeed, he happened to see you standing there, crouching and shaking. That's the right way to bring him upon you.'

'But suppose he opens it, and knows who was in school?'

'What then? D'ye think we can't stand by each other, and keep our own counsel?'

'But the blotting-paper—suppose he knows that!'

There was a good laugh all round at this, 'as if Harrison knew everyone's blotting-paper!'

'Yes, but Harry used to write his name all over his—see—and draw union-jacks on it.'

'If he did, the date is not there. Do you think the ink is going to say March 2nd? Why should not July have done it last half?'

'July would have told if he had,' said Larkins, 'That's no go.'

'Aye! That's the way—the Mays are all like girls—can't keep a secret—not one of them. There, I've done more for you than ever one of them would have done—own it—and he strode up to Tom, and grasped his wrists, to force the confession from him.'

'But—he'll ask when he finds it out—'

'Let him. We know nothing about it. Don't be coming the good boy over me like your brothers. That won't do—I know whose eyes are not too short-sighted to read upside down.'

Tom shrank and looked abject, clinging to the hope that Mr. Harrison would not open the book for weeks, months, or years.

But the next morning, his heart died within him, when he beheld the unfortunate piece of blotting-paper, displayed by Mr. Harrison, with the inquiry whether anyone knew to whom it belonged, and what made it worse was, that his sight would not reach far enough to assure him whether Harry's name was on it, and he dreaded that Norman or Hector Ernescliffe should recognise the nautical designs. However, both let it pass, and no one through the whole school attempted to identify it. One danger was past, but the next minute Mr. Harrison opened his Smith's Antiquities at the page where stood the black witness. Tom gazed round in despair, he could not see his brother's face, but Edward Anderson, from the second firm, returned him a glance of contemptuous encouragement.

'This book,' said Mr. Harrison, 'was left in school for a quarter of an hour yesterday. When I opened it again, it was in this condition. Do any of you know how it happened?' A silence, and he continued, 'Who was in school at the time? Anderson, junior, can you tell me anything of it?'

'No, Sir.'

'You know nothing of it?'

'No, Sir.'

Cold chills crept over Tom, as Mr. Harrison looked round to refresh his memory. 'Larkins, do you know how this happened?'

'No, Sir,' said Larkins, boldly, satisfying his conscience because he had not seen the manner of the overthrow.

'Ernescliffe, were you there?'

'No, Sir.'

Tom's timid heart fluttered in dim hope that he had been overlooked, as Mr. Harrison paused, then said, 'Remember, it is con-

cealment that is the evil, not the damage to the book. I shall have a good opinion ever after of a boy honest enough to confess. May junior, I saw you,' he added, hopefully and kindly. 'Don't be afraid to speak out, if you did meet with a mischance.'

Tom coloured and turned pale. Anderson and Larkins grimaced at him, to remind him that they had told untruths for his sake, and that he must not betray them. It was the justification he wanted; he was relieved to fancy himself obliged to tell the direct falsehood, for which a long course of petty acted deceits had paved the way, for he was in deadly terror of the effects of truth.

'No, Sir.' He could hardly believe he had said the words, or that they would be so readily accepted, for Mr. Harrison had only the impression that he knew who the guilty person was, and would not tell, and, therefore, put no more questions to him, but, after a few more vain inquiries, was baffled, and gave up the investigation.

Tom thought he should have been very unhappy; he had always heard that deceit was a heavy burthen, and would give continual stings, but he was surprised to find himself very comfortable on the whole, and able to dismiss repentance as well as terror. His many underhand ways with Richard had taken away the tenderness of his conscience, though his knowledge of what was right was clear; and he was quite ready to accept the feeling prevalent at Stoneborough, that truth was not made for school-boys.

The axiom was prevalent, but not universal, and parties were running high. Norman May, who, as head boy, had, in play-hours, the responsibility, and almost the authority of a master, had taken higher ground than was usual even with the well-disposed; and felt it his duty to check abuses and malpractices that his predecessors had allowed. His friend, Cheviot, and the right-minded set, maintained his authority with all their might; but Harvey Anderson regarded his interference as vexatious, always took the part of the offenders, and opposed him in every possible way, thus gathering as his adherents not only the idle and mischievous, but the weak and mediocre, and, among this set, there was a positive bitterness of feeling to May, and all whom they considered as belonging to him.

In shielding Tom May and leading him to deceive, the younger Anderson had gained a conquest—in him the Mays had fallen from that pinnacle of truth which was a standing reproach to the average Stoneborough code—and, from that time, he was under the especial patronage of his friend. He was taught the most ingenious arts of saying a lesson without learning it, and of showing up other people's tasks; whispers and signs were directed to him to help him out of difficulties, and he was sought out and put forward whenever a forbidden pleasure was to be enjoyed by stealth. These were his stimulants under a heavy bondage; he was teased and frightened, bullied and tormented, whenever it was the fancy of Ned Anderson and his associates to make his timidity their sport; he was scorned

and ill-treated, and driven, by bodily terror, into acts alarming to his conscience, dangerous in their consequences, and painful in the perpetration; and yet, among all his sufferings, the little coward dreaded nothing so much as truth, though it would have set him free at once from this wretched tyranny.

Excepting on holidays, and at hours when the town-boys were allowed to go home, there were strict rules confining all except the sixth form to their bounds, consisting of two large courts, and an extensive field bordered by the river and the road. On the opposite side of the bridge there was a turnpike gate, where the keeper exposed stalls of various eatables, very popular among the boys, chiefly because they were not allowed to deal there. Ginger-beer could also be procured, and there were suspicions, that the bottles so called, contained something contraband.

'August,' said Norman, as they were coming home from school one evening, 'did I see you coming over the bridge?'

Tom would not answer.

'So you have been at Ballhatchet's gate? I can't think what could take you there. If you want tarts, I am sure poor old Betty's are just as good. What made you go there?'

'Nothing,' said Tom.

'Well, mind you don't do it again, or I shall have to take you in hand, which I shall be very sorry to do. That man is a regular bad character, and neither my father nor Dr. Hoxton would have one of us have anything to do with him, as you know.'

Tom was in hopes it was over, but Norman went on. 'I am afraid you are getting into a bad way. Why won't you mind what I have told you plenty of times before, that no good comes of going after Ned Anderson, and Axworthy, and that set. What were you doing with them to-day?' but, receiving no answer, he went on. 'You always sulk when I speak to you. I suppose you think I have no right to row you, but I do it to save you from worse. You can't *never* be found out.' This startled Tom, but Norman had no suspicion. 'If you go on, you will get into some awful scrape, and papa will be grieved. I would not, for all the world, have him put out of heart about you. Think of him, Tom, and try to keep straight.' Tom would say nothing, only reflecting that his elder brother was harder upon him than anyone else would be, and Norman grew warmer. 'If you let Anderson junior get hold of you and teach you his tricks, you'll never be good for anything. He seems good-natured now, but he will turn against you, as he did with Harry. I know how it is, and you had better take my word, and trust to me and straight-forwardness, when you get into a mess.'

'I'm in no scrape,' said Tom, so doggedly, that Norman lost patience, and spoke with more displeasure. 'You will be then, if you go out of bounds, and run Anderson's errands, and shirk work. You'd better take care. It is my place to keep order, and I can't

let you off for being my brother ; so remember, if I catch you going to Ballhatchet's again, you may make sure of a lieking.'

So the warning closed—Tom more alarmed at the aspect of right, which he fancied terrific, and Norman with some compunction at having lost temper and threatened, when he meant to have gained him by kindness.

Norman recollected his threat with a qualm of dismay when, at the end of the week, as he was returning from a walk with Cheviot, Tom darted out of the gate-house. He was flying across the bridge, with something under his arm, when Norman laid a detaining hand on his collar, making a sign at the same time to Cheviot to leave them.

'What are you doing here?' said Norman, sternly, marching Tom into the field. 'So you've been there again. What's that under your jacket?'

'Only—only what I was sent for,' and he tried to squeeze it under the flap.

'What is it? a bottle—'

'Only—only a bottle of ink.'

Norman seized it, and gave Tom a fierce angry shake, but the indignation was mixed with sorrow. 'O Tom, Tom, these fellows have brought you a pretty pass. Who would have thought of such a thing from us!'

Tom cowered, but felt only terror.

'Speak truth,' said Norman, ready to shake it out of him; 'is this for Anderson junior?'

Under those eyes flashing with generous, sorrowful wrath, he dared not utter another falsehood, but Anderson's threats chained him, and he preferred his thralldom to throwing himself on the mercy of his brother who loved him. He would not speak.

'I am glad it is not for yourself,' said Norman; 'but do you remember what I said, in case I found you there again?'

'Oh! don't, don't!' cried the boy. 'I would never have gone if they had not made me.'

'Made you?' said Norman, disdainfully, 'how?'

'They would have thrashed me—they pinched my fingers in the box—they pulled my ears—Oh, don't—'

'Poor little fellow!' said Norman; 'but it is your own fault. If you won't keep with me, or Ernescliffe, of course they will bully you. But I must not let you off—I must keep my word!' Tom cried, sobbed, and implored in vain. 'I can't help it,' he said, 'and now, don't howl! I had rather no one knew it. It will soon be over. I never thought to have this to do to one of us.' Tom roared and struggled, till, releasing him, he said, 'There, that will do. Stop bellowing, I was obliged, and I can't have hurt you much, have I?' he added more kindly, while Tom went on crying, and turning from him. 'It is nothing to care about, I am sure, look

up; and he pulled down his hands. 'Say you are sorry—speak the truth—keep with me, and no one shall hurt you again.'

Very different this from Tom's chosen associates; but he was still obdurate, sullen, and angry, and would not speak, nor open his heart to those kind words. After one more, 'I could not help it, Tom, you've no business to be sulky,' Norman took up the bottle, opened it, smelt, and tasted, and was about to throw it into the river, when Tom exclaimed, 'O don't, don't! what will they do to me? give it to me!'

'Did they give you the money to pay for it?'

'Yes, let me have it.'

'How much was it?'

'Fourpence.'

'I'll settle that,' and the bottle splashed in the river. 'Now then, Tom, don't brood on it any more. Here's a chance for you of getting quit of their errands. If you will keep in my sight, I'll take care no one bullies you, and you may still leave off these disgraceful tricks, and do well.'

But Tom's evil spirit whispered that Norman had beaten him, that he should never have any diversion again, and that Anderson would punish him; and there was a sort of satisfaction in seeing that his perverse silence really distressed his brother.

'If you will go on this way, I can't help it, but you'll be scrry some day,' said Norman, and he walked thoughtfully on, looking back to see whether Tom were following, as he did slowly, meditating on the way, how he should avert his tyrant's displeasure.

Norman stood for a moment at the door surveying the court, then walked up to a party of boys, and laid his hand on the shoulder of one, holding a silver fourpence to him. 'Anderson junior,' said he, 'there's your money. I am not going to let Stoneborough school be turned into a gin palace. I give you notice, it is not to be. Now, you are not to bully May junior, for telling me. He did not, I found him out.'

Leaving Anderson to himself he looked for Tom, but not seeing him, he entered the Cloister, for it was the hour when he was used to read there, but he could not fix his mind. He went to the bench where he had lain, on the examination-day, and kneeling on it, looked out on the green grass where the graves were. 'Mother! Mother!' he murmured, 'have I been harsh to your poor little tender sickly boy? I couldn't help it. Oh! if you were but here! We are all going wrong! What shall I do? How should Tom be kept from this evil?—it is ruining him! mean, false, cowardly, sullen—all that is worst—and your son—Oh! Mother! and all I do only makes him shrink more from me. It will break my father's heart, and you will not be there to comfort him.'

Norman covered his face with his hands, and a fit of bitter grief came over him. But his sorrow was now not what it had been before

his father's resignation had tempered it, and soon it turned to prayer, resolution, and hope.

He would try again to reason quietly with him, when the alarm of detection and irritation should have gone off, and he sought for the occasion; but, alas! Tom had learnt to look on all reproof as 'rowing,' and considered it as an additional injury from a brother, who according to the Anderson view, should have connived at his offences, and turned a deafened ear and dogged countenance to all he said. The foolish boy sought after the Andersons still more, and Norman became more dispirited about him, greatly missing Harry, that constant companion and follower, who would have shared his perplexities, and removed half of them, in his own part of the school, by the influence of his high, courageous, and truthful spirit.

In the meantime Richard was studying hard at home, with greater hopefulness and vigour than he had ever thrown into his work before. 'Suppose,' Ethel had once said to him, 'that when you are a Clergyman, you could be Curate of Cocks Moor, when there is a church there.'

'When?' said Richard, smiling at the presumption of the scheme, and yet it formed itself into a sort of definite hope. Perhaps they might persuade Mr. Ramsden to take him as a Curate with a view to Cocks Moor, and this prospect, vague as it was, gave an object and hope to his studies. Everyone thought the delay of his examination favourable to him, and he now read with a determination to succeed. Dr. May had offered to let him read with Mr. Harrison, but Richard thought he was getting on pretty well, with the help Norman gave him; for it appeared that ever since Norman's return from London, he had been assisting Richard, who was not above being taught by a younger brother; while on the other hand, Norman, much struck by his humility, would not for the world have published that he was fit to act as his elder's tutor.

One evening, when the two boys came in from school, Tom gave a great start, and, pulling Mary by the sleeve, whispered, 'How came that book here?'

'It is Mr. Harrison's.'

'Yes, I know, but how came it here?'

'Richard borrowed it to look out something, and Ethel brought it down.'

A little re-assured, Tom took up an exciting story-book and ensconced himself by the fire, but his agonies were great during the ensuing conversation.

'Norman,' Ethel was exclaiming in delight, 'do you know this book?'

'Smith? Yes, it is in the school library.'

'There's everything in it that one wants, I do believe. Here is such an account of ancient galleys—I never knew how they managed

their banks of rowers before—Oh! and the Greek houses—look at the pictures too.’

‘Some of them are the same as Mr. Rivers’ gems,’ said Norman, standing behind her, and turning the leaves, in search of a favourite

‘Oh! what did I see? is that ink?’ said Flora, from the opposite side of the table.

‘Yes, didn’t you hear?’ said Ethel. ‘Mr. Harrison told Ritchie when he borrowed it, that unluckily one day this spring he left it in school, and some of the boys must have upset an inkstand over it; but, though he asked them all round, each denied it. How I should hate for such things to happen! and it was a prize book too.’

While Ethel spoke she opened the marked page, to show the extent of the calamity, and as she did so Mary exclaimed, ‘Dear me! how funny! why, how did Harry’s blotting-paper get in there?’

Tom shrank into nothing, set his teeth, and pinched his fingers, ready to wish they were on Mary’s throat, more especially as the words made some sensation. Richard and Margaret exchanged looks, and their father, who had been reading, sharply raised his eyes and said, ‘Harry’s blotting-paper! How do you know that, Mary?’

‘It is Harry’s,’ said she, all unconscious, ‘because of that anchor up in one corner, and the union-jack in the other. Don’t you see, Ethel?’

‘Yes,’ said Ethel, ‘nobody drew that but Harry.’

‘Aye, and there are his buttons,’ said Mary, much amused and delighted with these relics of her beloved Harry. ‘Don’t you remember one day last holidays, papa desired Harry to write and ask Mr. Ernescliffe what clothes he ought to have for the naval school, and all the time he was writing the letter, he was drawing sailor’s buttons on his blotting-paper. I wonder how ever it got into Mr. Harrison’s book!’

Poor Mary’s honest wits did not jump to a conclusion quite so fast as other people’s, and she little knew what she was doing, when, as a great discovery, she exclaimed, ‘I know! Harry gave his paper-case to Tom. That’s the way it got to school!’

‘Tom!’ exclaimed his father, suddenly and angrily, ‘where are you going?’

‘To bed,’ muttered the miserable Tom, twisting his hands. A dead silence of consternation fell on all the room. Mary gazed from one to the other, mystified at the effect of her words, frightened at her father’s loud voice, and at Tom’s trembling confusion. The stillness lasted for some moments, and was first broken by Flora, as if she had caught at a probability. ‘Some one might have used the first blotting-paper that came to hand.’

‘Come here, Tom,’ said the Doctor, in a voice not loud, but trembling with anxiety; then laying his hand on his shoulder,

Look in my face.' Tom hung his head, and his father put his hand under his chin, and raised the pale terrified face.

'Don't be afraid to tell us the meaning of this. If any of your friends have done it, we will keep your secret. Look up, and speak out. How did your blotting-paper come there?'

Tom had been attempting his former system of silent sullenness, but there was anger at Mary, and fear of his father to agitate him, and in his impatient despair at thus being held and questioned, he burst out into a violent fit of crying.

'I can't have you roaring here to distress Margaret,' said Dr. May. 'Come into the study with me.'

But Tom, who seemed fairly out of himself, would not stir, and a screaming and kicking scene took place, before he was carried into the study by his brothers, and there left with his father. Mary, meantime, dreadfully alarmed, and perceiving that, in some way, she was the cause, had thrown herself upon Margaret, sobbing inconsolably, as she begged to know what was the matter, and why papa was angry with Tom—had she made him so?

Margaret caressed and soothed her, to the best of her ability, trying to persuade her that, if Tom had done wrong, it was better for him it should be known, and assuring her that no one could think her unkind, nor a tell-tale; then dismissing her to bed, and Mary was not unwilling to go, for she could not bear to meet Tom again, only begging in a whisper to Ethel, 'that, if dear Tom had not done it, she would come and tell her.'

'I am afraid there is no hope of that!' sighed Ethel, as the door closed on Mary.

'After all,' said Flora, 'he has not said anything. If he has only done it, and not confessed, that is not so bad—it is only the usual fashion of boys.'

'Has he been asked? Did he deny it?' said Ethel, looking in Norman's face, as if she hardly ventured to put the question, and she only received sorrowful signs as answers. At the same moment Dr. May called him. No one spoke. Margaret rested her head on the sofa, and looked very mournful, Richard stood by the fire without moving limb or feature, Flora worked fast, and Ethel leant back on an arm-chair, biting the end of a paper-knife.

The Doctor and Norman came back together. 'I have sent him up to bed,' said Dr. May. 'I must take him to Harrison tomorrow morning. It is a terrible business!'

'Has he confessed it?' said Margaret.

'I can hardly call such a thing a confession—I wormed it out bit by bit—I could not tell whether he was telling truth or not, till I called Norman in.'

'But he has not said anything more untrue—'

'Yes, he has though!' said Dr. May, indignantly. 'He said Ned Anderson put the paper there, and had been taking up the ink

with it—'twas his doing—then when I came to cross-examine him I found that though Anderson did take up the ink, it was Tom himself who knocked it down—I never heard anything like it—I never could have believed it!’

‘It must all be Ned Anderson’s doing!’ cried Flora. ‘They are enough to spoil anybody.’

‘I am afraid they have done him a great deal of harm,’ said Norman.

‘And what have you been about all the time’ exclaimed the Doctor, too keenly grieved to be just. ‘I should have thought that with you at the head of the school, the child might have been kept out of mischief; but there have you been going your own way, and leaving him to be ruined by the very worst set of boys!’

Norman’s colour rose with the extreme pain this unjust accusation caused him, and his voice, though low, was not without irritation. ‘I *have* tried. I have not done as much as I ought, perhaps, but—’

‘No, I think not, indeed!’ interrupted his father. ‘Sending a boy there, brought up as he had been, without the least tendency to deceit—’

Here no one could see Norman’s burning cheeks, and brow bent downwards in the effort to keep back an indignant reply, without bursting out in exculpation; and Richard looked up, while the three sisters all at once began, ‘O no, no, papa—’ and left Margaret to finish—‘Poor little Tom had not always been quite sincere.’

‘Indeed! and why was I left to send him to school without knowing it? The place of all others to foster deceit.’

‘It was my fault, papa,’ said Margaret.

‘And mine,’ put in Richard; and she continued, ‘Ethel told us we were very wrong, and I wish we had followed her advice. It was by far the best but we were afraid of vexing you.’

‘Everyone seems to have been combined to hide what they ought not!’ said Dr. May, though speaking to her much more softly than to Norman, to whom he turned angrily again. ‘Pray how came you not to identify this paper?’

‘I did not know it,’ said Norman, speaking with difficulty.

‘He ought never to have been sent to school,’ said the Doctor, —‘that tendency was the very worst beginning.’

‘It was a great pity; I was very wrong,’ said Margaret, in great concern.

‘I did not mean to blame you, my dear,’ said her father, affectionately. ‘I know you only meant to act for the best, but—’ and he put his hand over his face, and then came the sighing groan, which pained Margaret ten thousand times more than reproaches, and which, in an instant, dispersed all the indignation burning within Norman, though the pain remained at his father’s thinking

him guilty of neglect, but he did not like, at that moment, to speak in self-justification.

After a short space, Dr. May desired to hear what were the deceptions to which Margaret had alluded, and made Norman tell what he knew of the affair of the blotted book. Ethel spoke hopefully when she had heard it. 'Well, do you know, I think he will do better now. You see, Edward made him conceal it, and he has been going on with it on his mind, and in that boy's power ever since; but now it is cleared up and confessed, he will begin afresh and do better. Don't you think so, Norman? don't you, papa?'

'I should have more hope, if I had seen anything like confession or repentance,' said Dr. May; 'but that provoked me more than all—I could only perceive that he was sorry to be found out, and afraid of punishment.'

'Perhaps, when he has recovered the first fright, he will come to his better self,' said Margaret; for she guessed, what indeed was the case, that the Doctor's anger on this first shock of the discovery of the fault, he most abhorred, had been so great, that a fearful cowering spirit would be completely overwhelmed; and, as there had been no sorrow shown for the fault, there had been none of that softening and relenting that won so much love and confidence.

Everyone felt that talking only made them more unhappy, they tried to return to their occupations, and so passed the time till night. Then, as Richard was carrying Margaret upstairs, Norman lingered to say, 'Papa, I am very sorry you should think I neglected Tom. I dare say I might have done better for him, but, indeed, I have tried.'

'I am sure you have, Norman. I spoke hastily, my boy—you will not think more of it. When a thing like this comes on a man, he hardly knows what he says.'

'If Harry were here,' said Norman, anxious to turn from the real loss and grief, as well as to talk away that feeling of being apologized to, 'it would all do better. He would make a link with Tom, but I have so little, naturally, to do with the second form, that it is not easy to keep him in sight.'

'Yes, yes, I know that very well. It is no one's fault but my own; I should not have sent him there without knowing him better. But you see how it is, Norman—I have trusted to her, till I have grown neglectful, and it is well if it is not the ruin of him!'

'Perhaps he will take a turn, as Ethel says,' answered Norman, cheerfully. 'Good night, papa.'

'I have a blessing to be thankful for in you, at least,' murmured the Doctor to himself. 'What other young fellow of that age and spirit would have borne so patiently with my injustice? Not I, I am sure! a fine father I show myself to these poor children—neglect, helplessness, temper—O Maggie!'

Margaret had so bad a headache, the next day, that she could

not come down stairs. The punishment was, they heard, a flogging at the time, and an imposition so long, that it was likely to occupy a large portion of the play-hours till the end of the half year. His father said, and Norman silently agreed, 'a very good thing, it will keep him out of mischief;' but Margaret only wished she could learn it for him, and took upon herself all the blame from beginning to end. She said little to her father, for it distressed him to see her grieved; he desired her not to dwell on the subject, caressed her, called her his comfort and support, and did all he could to console her, but it was beyond his power; her sisters, by listening to her, only made her worse. 'Dear, dear papa,' she exclaimed, 'how kind he is! But he can never depend upon me again—I have been the ruin of my poor little Tom.'

'Well,' said Richard, quietly, 'I can't see why you should put yourself into such a state about it.'

This took Margaret by surprise. 'Have not I done very wrong, and perhaps hurt Tom for life?'

'I hope not,' said Richard. 'You and I made a mistake, but it does not follow that Tom would have kept out of this scrape, if we had told my father our notion.'

'It would not have been on my conscience,' said Margaret—'he would not have sent him to school.'

'I don't know that,' said Richard, 'At any rate we meant to do right, and only made a mistake. It was unfortunate, but I can't tell why you go and make yourself ill, by fancying it worse than it is. The boy has done very wrong, but people get cured of such things in time, and it is nonsense to fret as if he were not a mere child of eight years old. You did not teach him deceit.'

'No, but I concealed it—papa is disappointed, when he thought he could trust me.'

'Well! I suppose no one could expect never to make mistakes,' said Richard, in his sober tone.

'Self-sufficiency!' exclaimed Margaret, 'that has been the root of all! Do you know, Ritchie, I believe I was expecting that I could always judge rightly.'

'You generally do,' said Richard; 'no one else could do half what you do.'

'So you have said, papa, and all of you, till you have spoilt me. I have thought it myself, Ritchie.'

'It is true,' said Richard.

'But then, said Margaret, 'I have grown to think much of it, and not like to be interfered with. I thought I could manage by myself, and when I said I would not worry papa, it was half because I liked the doing and settling all about the children myself. Oh! if it could have been visited in any way but by poor Tom's faults!'

'Well,' said Richard, 'if you felt so, it was a pity, though I never should have guessed it. But you see you will never feel so again, and

as Tom is only one, and there are nine to govern, it is all for the best.'

His deliberate common sense made her laugh a little, and she owned he might be right. 'It is a good lesson against my love of being first. But indeed it is difficult—papa can so little bear to be harassed.'

'He could not at first, but now he is strong and well, it is different.'

'He looks terribly thin and worn still,' sighed Margaret, 'so much older!'

'Aye, I think he will never get back his young looks; but except his weak arm, he is quite well.'

'And then his—his quick way of speaking may do harm.'

'Yes, that was what I feared for Tom,' said Richard, 'and there was the mistake. I see it now. My father always is right in the main, though he is apt to frighten one at first, and it is what ought to be, that he should rule his own house. But now, Margaret, it is silly to worry about it any more—let me fetch baby, and don't think of it.'

And Margaret allowed his reasonableness, and let herself be comforted. After all, Richard's solid soberness had more influence over her than anything else.



CHAPTER XX.

'Think how simple things and lowly,
Have a part in Nature's plan,
How the great hath small beginnings,
And the child will be a man.
Little efforts work great actions,
Lessons in our childhood taught
Mould the spirit and the temper
Whereby blessed deeds are wrought.
Cherish, then, the gifts of childhood,
Use them gently, guard them well,
For their future growth and greatness
Who can measure, who can tell!'

MORAL SONGS.

THE first shock of Tom's misdemeanor passed away, though it still gave many an anxious thought to such of the family as felt responsible for him.

The girls were busily engaged in preparing an Easter feast for Cocks Moor. Mr. Wilmot was to examine the scholars, and buns and tea were provided, in addition to which Ethel designed to make a present to everyone—a great task, considering that the Cocks Moor funds were reserved for absolute necessaries, and were at a very low ebb. So that twenty-five gifts were to be composed out of nothing!

There was a grand turn-out of drawers of rubbish, all over Margaret, raising such a cloud of dust, as nearly choked her. What cannot rubbish and willing hands effect! Envelopes and wafer boxes were ornamented with pictures, bags, needle-cases, and pin

cushions, beautiful balls, tippets, both of list and gay print, and even sun-bonnets and pinafores were contrived, to the supreme importance and delight of Mary and Blanche, who found it as good or better than play, and ranged their performances in rows, till the room looked liked a bazaar. To provide for boys was more difficult; but Richard mended old toys, and repaired the frames of slates, and Norman's contribution of half-a-crown bought mugs, marbles, and penny knives, and there were even hopes that something would remain for bodkins, to serve as nozzles to the bellows, which were the pride of Blanche's heart.

Never were Easter gifts the source of more pleasure to the givers, especially when the nursery establishment met Dr. Hoxton near the pastry-cook's shop, and he bestowed on Blanche a packet of variegated sugar-plums, all of which she literally poured out at Ethel's feet, saying, 'I don't want them. Only let me have one for Aubrey, because he is so little. All the rest are for the poor children on Cocks Moor.'

After this, Margaret declared that Blanche must be allowed to buy the bodkins, and give her bellows to Jane Taylor, the only Cocks Moor child she knew, and to whom she always destined in turn every gift that she thought most successful.

So Blanche went with Flora to the toy-shop, and there fell in love with a little writing-box, that so eclipsed the bellows, that she tried to persuade Flora to buy it for Jane Taylor, to be kept till she could write, and was much disappointed to hear that it was out of the question. Just then, a carriage stopped, and from it stepped the pretty little figure of Meta Rivers.

'Oh! how do you? How delightful to meet you! I was wondering if we should! Little Blanche too!' kissing her, 'and here's Mrs. Larpent—Mrs. Larpent—Miss Flora May. How is Miss May?'

This was all uttered in eager delight, and Flora, equally pleased, answered the inquiries. 'I hope you are not in a hurry,' proceeded Meta, 'I want your advice. You know all about schools, don't you? I am come to get some Easter presents for our children, and I am sure you can help me.'

'Are the children little or big?' asked Flora.

'Oh! all sorts and sizes. I have some books for the great sensible ones, and some stockings and shoes for the tiresome stupid ones, but there are some dear little pets that I want nice things for. There—there's a doll that looks just fit for little curly-headed Annie Langley, don't you think so, Mrs. Larpent?'

The price of the doll was a shilling, and there were quickly added to it, boxes of toys, elaborate bead-work pincushions, polished blue and green boxes, the identical writing-case—even a small Noah's ark. Meta hardly asked the prices, which certainly were not extravagant, since she had nearly twenty articles for little more than a pound

'Papa has given me a benefaction of £5 for my school-gifts, said she, 'is not that charming? I wish you would come to the feast. Now do! It is on Easter Tuesday. Won't you come?'

'Thank you, I am afraid we can't. I should like it very much.

'You never will come to me. You have no compassion.'

'We should enjoy coming very much. Perhaps, in the summer, when Margaret is better.'

'Could not she spare any of you? Well, I shall talk to papa, and make him talk to Dr. May. Mrs. Larpent will tell you I always get my way. Don't I? Good-bye. See if I don't.'

She departed, and Flora returned to her own business; but Blanche's interest was gone. Dazzled by the more lavish gifts, she looked listlessly and disdainfully at bodkins three for twopence. 'I wish I might have bought the writing-box for Jane Taylor! Why does not papa give us money to get pretty things for the children?' said she, as soon as they came out.

'Because he is not so rich as Miss Rivers's papa.'—Flora was interrupted by meeting the Miss Andersons, who asked, 'Was not that carriage Mr. Rivers's of Abbotstoke Grange?'

'Yes. We like Miss Rivers very much,' said Flora, resolved to show that she was acquainted.

'Oh! do you visit her? I knew he was a patient of Dr. May.' Flora thought there was no need to tell that the only call had been owing to the rain, and continued, 'She has been begging us to come to her school feast, but I do not think we can manage it.'

'Oh! indeed, the Grange is very beautiful, is it not?'

'Very,' said Flora. 'Good morning.'

Flora had a little uneasiness in her conscience, but it was satisfactory to have put down Louisa Anderson, who never could aspire to an intimacy with Miss Rivers. Her little sister looked up—'Why, Flora, have you seen the Grange?'

'No, but papa and Nerman said so.'

And Blanche showed that the practical lesson on the pomps of the world was not lost on her, by beginning to wish they were as rich as Miss Rivers. Flora told her it was wrong to be discontented, but the answer was, 'I don't want it for myself, I want to have pretty things to give away.'

And her mind could not be turned from the thought by any attempt of her sister. Even when they met Dr. May coming out of the hospital, Blanche renewed the subject. She poured out the catalogue of Miss Rivers's purchases, making appealing attempts at looking under his spectacles into his eyes, and he perfectly understood the tenor of her song.

'I have had a sight, too, of little maidens preparing Easter gifts, said he.

'Have you, papa? What were they? Were they as nice as Miss Rivers's?'

‘I don’t know, but I thought they were the best sort of gifts, for I saw that plenty of kind thought and clever contrivance went to them, aye, and some little self-denial too.’

‘Papa, you look as if you meant *something*; but ours are nothing but nasty old rubbish.’

‘Perhaps some fairy, or something better, has brought a wand to touch the rubbish, Blanche; for I think that the maidens gave what would have been worthless kept, but became precious as they gave it.’

‘Do you mean the list of our flannel petticoats, papa, that Mary has made into a tippet?’

‘Perhaps I meant Mary’s own time and pains, as well as the tippet. Would she have done much good with them otherwise?’

‘No, she would have played. Oh! then, you like the presents because they are our own making? I never thought of that. Was that the reason you did not give us any of your sovereigns to buy things with?’

‘Perhaps I want my sovereigns for the eleven gaping mouths at home, Blanche. But would not it be a pity to spoil your pleasure? You would have lost all the chattering and laughing and buzzing I have heard round Margaret of late, and I am quite sure Miss Rivers can hardly be as happy in the gifts that cost her nothing, as one little girl who gives her sugar-plums out of her own mouth!’

Blanche clasped her papa’s hand tight, and bounded five or six times. ‘They are our presents, not yours,’ said she. ‘Yes, I see. I like them better now.’

‘Aye, aye,’ said the Doctor. ‘Seeing Miss Rivers’s must not take the shine out of yours, my little maids; for if you can’t give much, you have the pleasure of giving the best of all, your labour of love.’ Then thinking on, and speaking to Flora, ‘The longer I live, the more I see the blessing of being born in a state of life where you can’: both eat your cake and give it away.’

Flora never was at ease in a conversation with her father; she could not follow him, and did not like to show it. She answered aside from the mark, ‘You would not have Blanche underrate Miss Rivers?’

‘No, indeed, she is as good and sweet a creature as ever came across me—most kind to Margaret, and loving to all the world. I like to see one whom care and grief have never set their grip upon. Most likely she would do like Ethel, if she had the opportunity, but she has not.’

‘So she has not the same merit?’ said Flora.

‘We don’t talk of merit. I meant that the power of sacrifice is a great advantage. The habit of small sacrifice that is made necessary in a large family is a discipline that only children are without; and so, with regard to wealth, I think people are to be pitied who

can give extensively out of such abundance that they can hardly feel the want.'

'In effect, they can do much more,' said Flora.

'I am not sure of that. They *can*, of course, but it must be at the cost of personal labour and sacrifice. I have often thought of the words, "Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have give I thee." And *such as we have* it is that does the good; the gold, if we have it, but, at any rate, the personal influence; the very proof of sincerity, shown by the exertion and self-denial, tells far more than money lightly come by, lightly spent.'

'Do you mean that a person who maintained a whole school would do less good than one who taught one child?'

'If the rich person take no pains, and leave the school to take care of itself—nay, if he only visit it now and then, and never let it inconvenience him, has he the least security that the scholars are obtaining any real good from it? If the teacher of the one child is doing his utmost, he is working for himself at least.'

'Suppose we could build, say our Church and school, on Cocks-moor at once, and give our superintendence besides?'

'If things were ripe for it, the means would come. As it is, it is a fine field for Ethel and Richard. I believe it will be the making of them both. I am sure it is training Ethel, or making her train herself, as we could never have done without it. But here, come in and see old Mrs. Robins. A visit from you will cheer her up.'

Flora was glad of the interruption, the conversation was uncomfortable to her. She almost fancied her papa was moralizing for their good, but that he carried it too far, for wealthy people assuredly had it in their power to do great things, and might work as hard themselves; besides, it was finer in them, there was so much *eclat* in their stooping to charity. But her knowledge of his character would not allow her to think for a moment that he could say aught but from the bottom of his heart—no, it was one of his one-sided views that led him into paradox. 'It was just like papa,' and so there was no need to attend to it. It was one of his enthusiasms, he was so very fond of Ethel, probably because of her likeness to himself. Flora thought Ethel put almost too forward—they all helped at Cocks-moor, and Ethel was very queer and unformed, and could do nothing by herself. The only thing Flora did keep in her mind was, that her papa had spoken to her, as if she were a woman compared with Ethel.

Little Blanche made her report of the conversation to Mary, 'that it was so nice; and now she did not care about Miss Rivers's fine presents at all, for papa said what one made one's self was better to give than what one bought. And papa said, too, that it was a good thing not to be rich, for then one never felt the miss of what one gave away.'

Margaret, who overheard the exposition, thought it so much to

Blanche's credit, that she could not help repeating it in the evening, after the little girl was gone to bed, when Mr. Wilmot had come in to arrange the programme for Cocks Moor. So the little fit of discontent and its occasion, the meeting with Meta Rivers, were discussed.

'Yes,' said Mr. Wilmot, 'those Riverses are open-handed. They really seem to have so much money, that they don't know what to do with it. My brother is ready to complain that they spoil his parish. It is all meant so well, and they are so kind-hearted and excellent, that it is a shame to find fault, and I tell Charles and his wife that their grumbling at such a squire proves them the most spoilt of all.'

'Indiscriminate liberality?' asked the Doctor. 'I should guess the old gentleman to be rather soft!'

'That's one thing. The parish is so small, and there are so few to shower all this bounty on, and they are so utterly unused to country people. They seem to think by laying out money they can get a show set of peasants in rustic cottages, just as they have their fancy cows and poultry—all that offends the eye out of the way.'

'Making it a matter of taste,' said the Doctor.

'I'm sure I would,' said Norman aside to Ethel. 'What's the use of getting one's self disgusted?'

'One must not begin with showing dislike,' began Ethel, 'or—'

'Aye—you like rags, don't you? but hush.'

'That is just what I should expect of Mr. Rivers,' said Dr. May; 'he has cultivated his taste till it is getting to be a disease, but his daughter has no lack of wit.'

'Perhaps not. Charles and Mary are very fond of her, but she is entirely inexperienced, and that is a serious thing with so much money to throw about. She pays people for sending their children to school, and keeping their houses tidy; and there is so much given away, that it is enough to take away all independence and motive for exertion. The people speculate on it, and take it as a right; by-and-by there will be a re-action—she will find out she is imposed upon, take offence, and for the rest of her life will go about saying how ungrateful the poor are!'

'It is a pity good people won't have a little common sense,' said Dr. May. 'But there's something so bewitching in that little girl, that I can't give her up. I verily believe she will right herself.'

'I have scarcely seen her,' said Mr. Wilmot.

'She has won papa's heart by her kindness to me,' said Margaret, smiling. 'You see her beautiful flowers? She seems to me, made to lavish pleasures on others wherever she goes.'

'O yes, they are most kind-hearted,' said Mr. Wilmot. 'It is only the excess of a virtue that could be blamed in them, and they are most valuable to the place. She will learn experience in time—I only hope she will not be spoilt.'

Flora felt as if her father must be thinking his morning's argument confirmed, and she was annoyed. But she thought there was no reason why wealth should not be used sensibly, and if she were at the head of such an establishment as the Grange, her charity should be so well regulated as to be the subject of general approbation.

She wanted to find some one else on her side, and, as they went to bed, she said to Ethel, 'Don't you wish we had some of this superfluity of the Riverses for poor Cocksmeer?'

'I wish we had *any thing* for Cocksmeer! Here's a great hole in my boot, and nurse says I must get a new pair, that is seven-and-sixpence gone! I shall never get the first pound made up towards building!'

'And pounds seem nothing to them,' said Flora.

'Yes, but if they don't manage right with them—I'll tell you, Flora, I got into a fit of wishing the other day; it does seem such a grievous pity to see those children running to waste for want of daily teaching, and Jenny Hall had forgotten everything. I was vexed, and thought it was all no use while we could not do more; but just then I began to look out the texts Ritchie had marked for me to print for them to learn, and the first was, "Be thou faithful over a few things, and I will make thee ruler over many things," and then I thought perhaps we were learning to be faithful with a few things. I am sure what they said to-night showed it was lucky we have not more in our hands. I should do wrong for ever with the little we have if it were not for Ritchie and Margaret. By the time we have really got the money together for the school, perhaps I shall have more sense.'

'Got the money! As if we ever could!'

'Oh, yes! we shall and will. It need not be more than £70, Ritchie says, and I have twelve shillings for certain, put out from the money for hire of the room, and the books and clothes, and, in spite of these horrid boots, I shall save something out of this quarter, half-a-crown at least. And I have another plan besides—'

But Flora had to go down to Margaret's room to bed. Flora was always ready to throw herself into the present, and liked to be the most useful person in all that went forward, so that no thoughts of greatness interfered with her enjoyment at Cocksmeer.

The house seemed wild that Easter Monday morning. Ethel, Mary, and Blanche, flew about in all directions, and in spite of much undoing of their own arrangements, finished their preparations so much too early, that at half-past eleven, Mary complained that she had nothing to do, and that dinner would never come.

Many were the lamentations at leaving Margaret behind, but she answered them by talking of the treat of having papa all to herself, for he had lent them the gig, and promised to stay at home all the afternoon with her.

The first division started on foot directly after dinner, the real

council of education, as Norman called them, namely, Mr. Wilmot, Richard, Ethel, and Mary; Flora, the other member, waited to take care of Blanche and Aubrey, who were to come in the gig, with the cakes, tea-kettles, and prizes, driven by Norman. Tom and Hector Ernescliffe were invited to join the party, and many times did Mary wish for Harry.

Supremely happy were the young people as they reached the common, and heard the shout of tumultuous joy, raised by their pupils, who were on the watch for them. All was now activity. Everybody trooped into Mrs. Greene's house, while Richard and Ethel ran different ways to secure that the fires were burning, which they had hired, to boil their kettles, with the tea in them.

Then when the kitchen was so full that it seemed as if it could hold no more, some kind of order was produced, the children were seated on their benches, and while the mothers stood behind to listen, Mr. Wilmot began to examine, as well as he could in so crowded an audience.

There *was* progress. Yes, there was. Only three were as utterly rude and idealess as they used to be at Christmas. Glimmerings had dawned on most, and one—Una M'Carthy—was fit to come forward to claim Mr. Wilmot's promise of a Prayer-book. She could really read and say the Catechism, her Irish wit and love of learning had out-stripped all the rest, and she was the pride of Ethel's heart, fit, now, to present herself on equal terms with the Stoneborough set, as far as her sense was concerned—though, alas! neither present nor exhortation had succeeded in making her anything, in looks, but a picturesque tatterdemalion, her sandy elf locks streaming over a pair of eyes, so dancing and *gracieuses*, that it was impossible to scold her.

With beating heart, as if her own success in life depended for ever on the way her flock acquitted themselves, Ethel stood by Mr. Wilmot, trying to read answers coming out of the dull mouths of her children, and looking exultingly at Richard whenever some good reply was made, especially when Una answered an unexpected question. It was too delightful to hear how well she remembered all the history up to the flood, and how prettily it came out in her Irish accent! That made up for all the atrocious stupidity of others, who, after being told every time since they had begun, who gave their names, now chose to forget.

In the midst, while the assembly were listening with admiration to the reading of the scholar next in proficiency to Una, a boy, who could read words of five letters without spelling, there was a fresh squeezing at the door, and, the crowd opening as well as it could, in came Flora and Blanche, while Norman's head was seen for a moment in the doorway.

Flora's whisper to Ethel was her first discovery, that the close-

ness and heat of the room were nearly overpowering. Her excitement had made all be forgotten. 'Could not a window be opened?'

Mrs. Green interfered—it had been nailed up because her husband had the rheumatiz!

'Where's Aubrey?' asked Mary.

'With Norman. Norman said he would not let him go into the black-hole, so he has got him out of doors. Ethel! we must come out! You don't know what an atmosphere it is. Blanche, go out to Norman!'

'Flora, Flora! you don't consider,' said Ethel in an agony.

'Yes, yes. It is not at all cold. Let them have their presents out of doors, and eat their buns.'

Richard and Mr. Wilmot agreed with Flora, and the party were turned out. Ethel did own, when she was in the open air, 'that it had been rather hot.'

Norman's face was a sight, as he stood holding Aubrey in his arms, to gratify the child's impatience. The stifling den, the uncouth aspect of the children, the head girl so very ragged a specimen, thoroughly revolted his somewhat fastidious disposition. This was Ethel's delight! to this she made so many sacrifices! this was all that her time and labour had effected! He did not wish to vex her, but it was more than he could stand.

However, Ethel was too much engrossed to look for sympathy. It was a fine spring day, and on the open space of the common the arrangements were quickly made. The children stood in a long line, and the baskets were unpacked. Flora and Ethel called the names, Mary and Blanche gave the presents, and assuredly the grins, courtesies, and pull of the forelock they elicited, could not have been more hearty for any of Miss Rivers's treasures. The buns and kettles of tea followed—it was perfect delight to entertainers and entertained, except when Mary's dignity was cruelly hurt by Norman's authoritatively taking a kettle out of her hands, telling her she would be the death of herself or somebody else, and reducing her to the mere rank of a bun distributor, which Blanche and Aubrey could do just as well; while he stalked along with a grave and resigned countenance, filling up the cups held out to him by timid-looking children. Mary next fell in with Granny Hall, who had gone into such an ecstasy over Blanche and Aubrey, that Blanche did not know which way to look; and Aubrey, in some fear that the old woman might intend to kiss him, returned the compliments by telling her she was 'ugly up in her face,' at which she laughed heartily, and uttered more vehement benedictions.

Finally, the three best children, boys and girls, were to be made fit to be seen, and recommended by Mr. Wilmot to the Sunday-School and penny-club at Stoneborough, and, this being proclaimed, and the children selected, the assembly dispersed. Mr. Wilmot rejoicing Ethel and Richard, by saying, 'Well, really, you have made a

beginning; there is an improvement in tone among those children, that is more satisfactory than any progress they may have made.'

Ethel's eyes beamed, and she hurried to tell Flora. Richard coloured and gave his quiet smile, then turned to put things in order for their return.

'Will you drive home, Richard?' said Norman, coming up to him.

'Don't you wish it?' said Richard, who had many minor arrangements to make, and would have preferred walking home independently.

'No, thank you, I have a head-ache, and walking may take it off,' said Norman, taking off his hat and passing his fingers through his hair.

'A head-ache again—I am sorry to hear it.'

'It is only that suffocating den of yours. My head ached from the moment I looked into it. How can you take Ethel into such a hole, Richard? It is enough to kill her to go on with it for ever.'

'It is not so every day,' said the elder brother quietly. 'It is a warm day, and there was an unusual crowd.'

'I shall speak to my father,' exclaimed Norman, with somewhat of the supercilious tone that he had now and then been tempted to address to his brother. 'It is not fit that Ethel should give up everything, health and all, to such a set as these. They look as if they had been picked out of the gutter—dirt, squalor, everything disgusting, and summer coming on, too, and that horrid place with no window to open! It is utterly unbearable!'

Richard stooped to pick up a heavy basket, then smiled and said, 'You must get over such things as these if you mean to be a clergyman, Norman.'

'Whatever I am to be, it does not concern the girls being in such a place as this. I am surprised that you could suffer it.'

There was no answer—Richard was walking off with his basket, and putting it into the carriage. Norman was not pleased with himself, but thought it his duty to let his father know his opinion of Ethel's weekly resort. All he wished was to avoid Ethel herself, not liking to show her his sentiments, and he was glad to see her put into the gig with Aubrey and Mary.

They rushed into the drawing-room, full of glee, when they came home, all shouting their news together, and had not at first leisure to perceive that Margaret had some tidings for them in return. Mr. Rivers had been there, with a pressing invitation to his daughter's school-feast, and it had been arranged that Flora and Ethel should go and spend the day at the Grange, and their father come to dine, and fetch them home in the evening. Margaret had been much pleased with the manner in which the thing was done. When Dr. May, who seemed reluctant to accept the proposal that related to himself, was called out of the room, Mr. Rivers had, in a most kind manner, begged her to say whether she thought it would be painful to him, or whether it might do his spirits good. She

decidedly gave her opinion in favour of the invitation, Mr. Rivers gained his point, and she had ever since been persuading her father to like the notion, and assuring him it need not be made a precedent for the renewal of invitations to dine out in the town. He thought the change would be pleasant for his girls, and had, therefore, consented.

‘O, papa, papa! thank you!’ cried Ethel, enraptured, as soon as he came into the room. ‘How very kind of you! How I have wished to see the Grange, and all Norman talks about! Oh dear! I am so glad you are going there too!’

‘Why, what should you do with me?’ said Dr. May, who felt and looked depressed at this taking up of the world again.

‘Oh dear! I should not like it at all without you! It would be no fun at all by ourselves. I wish Flora would come home. How pleased she will be! Papa! I do wish you would look as if you didn’t mind it. I can’t enjoy it if you don’t like going.’

‘I shall when I am there, my dear,’ said the Doctor, affectionately, putting his arm around her as she stood by him. ‘It will be a fine day’s sport for you.’

‘But can’t you like it beforehand, papa?’

‘Not just this minute, Ethel,’ said he, with his bright sad smile. ‘All I like just now, is my girl’s not being able to do without me; but we’ll do the best we can—So your flock acquitted themselves brilliantly? Who is your Senior Wrangler?’

Ethel threw herself eagerly into the history of the examination, and had almost forgotten the invitation till she heard the front door open. Then it was not she, but Margaret, who told Flora—Ethel could not, as she said, enjoy what seemed to sadden her father. Flora received it much more calmly. ‘It will be very pleasant,’ said she; ‘it was very kind of papa to consent. You will have Richard and Norman, Margaret, to be with you in the evening.’

And, as soon as they went up-stairs, Ethel began to write down the list of prizes in her school journal, while Flora took out the best evening frocks, to study whether the crape looked fresh enough.

The invitation was a convenient subject of conversation, for Norman had so much to tell his sisters of the curiosities they must look for at the Grange, that he was not obliged to mention Coeksmoor. He did not like to mortify Ethel by telling her his intense disgust, and he knew he was about to do what she would think a great injury by speaking to his father on the subject; but he thought it for her real welfare, and took the first opportunity of making to his father and Margaret a most formidable description of Ethel’s black-hole. It quite alarmed Margaret, but the Doctor smiled, saying, ‘Aye, aye, I know the face Norman puts on if he looks into a cottage.’

'Well,' said Norman, with some mortification, 'all I know is, that my head ached all the rest of the day.'

'Very likely, but your head is not Ethel's, and there were twice as many people as the place was intended to hold.'

'A stuffy hole, full of peat-smoke, and with a window that can't open at the best of times.'

'Peat-smoke is wholesome,' said Dr. May, looking provoking.

'You don't know what it is, papa, or you would never let Ethel spend her life there. It is poisonous!'

'I'll take care of Ethel,' said Dr. May, walking off, and leaving Norman in a state of considerable annoyance at being thus treated. He broke out into fresh exclamations against the horrors of Cocks-moor, telling Margaret she had no idea what a den it was.

'But, Norman, it can't be so very bad, or Richard would not allow it.'

'Richard is deluded!' said Norman; 'but if he chooses to run after dirty brats, why should he take Ethel there?'

'My dear Norman, you know it is all Ethel's doing.'

'Yes, I know she has gone crazy after them, and given up all her Greek for it. It is past endurance!' said Norman, who had worked himself up into great indignation.

'Well, but surely, Norman, it is better they should do what they can for those poor creatures, than for Ethel to learn Greek.'

'I don't know that. Let those who are fit for nothing else go and drone over A,B,C, with ragged children, if they like. It is just their vocation; but there is an order in everything, Margaret, and minds of a superior kind are intended for higher purposes, not to be wasted in this manner.'

'I don't know whether they are wasted!' said Margaret, not quite liking Norman's tone, though she had not much to say to his arguments.

'Not wasted? Not in doing what anyone can do? I know what you'll say about the poor. I grant it, but high ability must be given for a purpose, not to be thrown away. It is common sense, that some one must be meant to do the dirty work.'

'I see what you mean, Norman, but I don't quite like that to be called by such a name. I think—' she hesitated. 'Don't you think you dislike such things more than—'

'Anyone must abominate dirt and slovenliness. I know what you mean. My father thinks 'tis all nonsense in me, but his profession has made him insensible to such things, and he fancies everyone else is the same! Now, Margaret, am I unreasonable?'

'I am sure I don't, know, dear Norman,' said Margaret, hesitating, and feeling it her duty to say something, 'I dare say it was very disagreeable.'

'And you think, too, that I made a disturbance for nothing?'

'No, indeed I don't, nor does dear papa. I have no doubt he will see whether it is proper for Ethel. All I think he meant is, that perhaps your not being well last winter, has made you a little more sensitive in such things.'

Norman paused, and coloured. He remembered the pain it had given him to find himself incapable of being of use to his father, and that he had resolved to conquer the weakness of nerve of which he was ashamed; but he did not like to connect this with his fastidious feelings of refinement. He would not own to himself that they were over nice, and, at the bottom of all this justification, rankled Richard's saying, that he who cared for such things was unfit for a clergyman. Norman's secret thought was, it was all very well for those who could only aspire to parish work in wretched cottages—people who could distinguish themselves were more useful at the University, forming minds, and opening new discoveries in learning.

Was Norman quite proof against the consciousness of daily excelling all his competitors? His superiority had become even more manifest this Easter, when Cheviot and Forder, the two elder boys whom he had outstripped, left the school, avowedly, because it was not worth while for them to stay, since they had so little chance of the Randall scholarship. Norman had now only to walk over the course, no one even approaching him but Harvey Anderson.

Meta Rivers always said that fine weather came at her call, and so it did—glowing sunshine streaming over the shaven turf, and penetrating even the solid masses of the great cedar.

The carriage was sent for the Miss Mays, and, at two o'clock, they arrived. Flora, extremely anxious that Ethel should comport herself discreetly; and Ethel full of curiosity and eagerness, the only drawback, her fears that her papa was doing what he disliked. She was not in the least shy, and did not think about her manner enough to be troubled by the consciousness that it had a good deal of abruptness and eagerness, and that her short sight made her awkward. Meta met them with out-stretched hands, and a face beaming with welcome. 'I told you I should get my way!' she said, triumphantly, and, after her warm greeting, she looked with some respect at the face of the Miss May, who was so very clever. It certainly was not what she expected, not at all like either of the four sisters she had already seen—brown, sallow, and with that sharp long nose, and the eager eyes, and brow a little knit by the desire to see as far as she could. It was pleasanter to look at Flora.

Ethel left the talk chiefly to Flora—there was wonder and study enough for her in the grounds and garden, and when Mrs. Larpent tried to enter into conversation with her, she let it drop two or three times, while she was peering hard at a picture, and trying to make out its subject. However, when they all went out to walk to Church, Ethel lighted up and talked, admired, and asked questions

in her quick, eager way, which interested Mrs. Larpent greatly. The governess asked after Norman, and no more was wanted to produce a volume of histories of his successes, till Flora turned as she walked before with Meta, saying, "Why, Ethel, you are quite overwhelming Mrs. Larpent."

But some civil answer convinced Ethel that what she said was interesting, and she would not be stopped in her account of their anxieties on the day of the examination. Flora was pleased that Meta, catching some words, begged to hear more, and Flora gave an account of the matter, soberer in terms, but quietly setting Norman at a much greater distance from all his competitors.

After Church came the feast in the school. It was a large commodious building. Meta declared it was very tiresome that it was so good inside, it was so ugly, she should never rest till papa had built her a real beauty. They found Mr. and Mrs. Charles Wilmot in the school, with a very nice well-dressed set of boys and girls, and—but there is no need to describe the roast-beef and plum-pudding, 'the feast ate merrily,' and Ethel was brilliantly happy waiting on the children, and so was sunny-hearted Meta. Flora was too busy in determining what the Riverses might be thinking of her and her sister to give herself up to the enjoyment.

Ethel found a small boy looking ready to cry at an untouched slice of beef. She examined him whether he could cut it, and at last discovered that, as had been the case with one or two of her own brothers at the same age, meat was repugnant to him. In her vehement manner, she flew off to fetch him some pudding, and hurrying up as she thought to Mr. Charles Wilmot, who had been giving out, she thrust her plate between him and the dish, and had begun her explanation, when she perceived it was a stranger, and she stood, utterly discomfited, not saying, 'I beg your pardon,' but only blushing, awkward and confused, as he spoke to her, in a good-natured, hospitable manner, which showed her it must be Mr. Rivers. She obtained her pudding, and, turning hastily, retreated.

'Meta,' said Mr. Rivers, as his daughter came out of the school with him, for, open and airy as it was, the numbers and the dinner made him regard it as Norman had viewed the Cocks Moor room, 'was that one of the Miss Mays?'

'Yes, papa, Ethel, the third, the clever one.'

'I thought she must be one of them from her dress; but what a difference between her and the others!'

Mr. Rivers was a great admirer of beauty, and Meta, brought up to be the same, was disappointed, but consoled herself by admiring Flora. Ethel, after the awkwardness was over, thought no more of the matter, but went on in full enjoyment of the feast. The eating finished, the making of presents commenced, and choice ones they were. The smiles of Meta and of the children were a pretty sight,

and Ethel thought she had never seen anything so like a beneficent fairy. Mr. and Mrs. Wilmot said their words of counsel and encouragement, and, by five o'clock, all was over.

'Oh! I am sorry!' said Meta, 'Easter won't come again for a whole year, and it has been so delightful. How that dear little Annie smiled and nursed her doll! I wish I could see her show it to her mother! Oh! how nice it is! I am so glad papa brought me to live in the country. I don't think anything can be so charming in all the world as seeing little children happy!'

Ethel could not think how the Wilmots could have found it in their heart to regret the liberality of this sweet damsel, on whom she began to look with Norman's enthusiastic admiration.

There was time for a walk round the grounds, Meta doing the honours to Flora, and Ethel walking with Mrs. Larpent. Both pairs were very good friends, and the two sisters admired and were charmed with the beauty of the gardens and conservatories—Ethel laying up a rich store of intelligence for Margaret; but still she was not entirely happy; her papa was more and more on her mind. He had looked dispirited at breakfast; he had a long hard day's work before him; and she was increasingly uneasy at the thought that it would be a painful effort to him to join them in the evening. Her mind was full of it when she was conducted, with Flora, to the room where they were to dress; and when Flora began to express her delight, her answer was only that she hoped it was not very unpleasant to papa.

'It is not worth while to be unhappy about that, Ethel. If it is an effort, it will be good for him when he is once here. I know he will enjoy it.'

'Yes, I should think he would—I hope he will. He must like you to have such a friend as Miss Rivers. How pretty she is!'

'Now, Ethel, it is high time to dress. Pray make yourself look nice—don't twist up your hair in that any-how fashion.'

Ethel sighed, then began talking fast about some hints on school-keeping which she had picked up for Cocksmoor.

Flora's glossy braids were in full order, while Ethel was still struggling to get her plait smooth, and was extremely beholden to her sister for taking it into her own hands, and doing the best with it that its thinness and roughness permitted. And then Flora pinched and pulled and arranged Ethel's frock, in vain attempts to make it sit like her own—those sharp high bones resisted all attempts to disguise them. 'Never mind, Flora, it is quite tidy, I am sure, there—do let me be in peace. You are like old nurse.'

'So those are all the thanks I get?'

'Well, thank you very much, dear Flora. You are a famous person. How I wish Margaret could see that lovely mimosa!'

'And, Ethel, do take care. Pray don't poke and spy when you come into the room, and don't frown when you are trying to see

I hope you won't have anything to help at dinner. Take care how you manage.'

'I'll try,' said Ethel, meekly, though a good deal tormented, as Flora went on with half-a-dozen more injunctions, closed by Meta's coming to fetch them. Little Meta did not like to show them her own bed-room—she pitied them so much when she thought of the contrast. She would have liked to put Flora's arm through her's, but she thought it would look neglectful of Ethel; so she only showed the way down stairs. Ethel forgot all her sister's orders; for there stood her father, and she looked most earnestly at his face. It was cheerful, and his voice sounded well-pleased as he greeted Meta; then resumed an animated talk with Mr. Rivers. Ethel drew as near him as she could; she had a sense of protection, and could open to full enjoyment when she saw him bright. At the first pause in the conversation, the gentlemen turned to the young ladies. Mr. Rivers began talking to Flora, and Dr. May, after a few pleasant words to Meta, went back to Ethel. He wanted her to see his favourite pictures—he led her up to them, made her put on his spectacles to see them better, and showed her their special merits. Mr. Rivers and the others joined them; Ethel said little, except a remark or two in answer to her papa, but she was very happy—she felt that he liked to have her with him; and Meta, too, was struck by the soundness of her few sayings, and the participation there seemed to be in all things between the father and daughter.

At dinner Ethel went on pretty well. She was next to her father, and was very glad to find the dinner so grand, that no side-dish fell to her lot to be carved. There was a great deal of pleasant talk, such as the girls could understand, though they did not join much in it, except that now and then Dr. May turned to Ethel as a reference for names and dates. To make up for silence at dinner, there was a most confidential chatter in the drawing-room. Flora and Meta on one side, hand in hand, calling each other by their Christian names, Mrs. Larpent and Ethel on the other. Flora dreaded only that Ethel was talking too much, and revealing too much in how different style they lived. Then came the gentlemen, Dr. May begging Mr. Rivers to show Ethel one of his prints, when Ethel stooped more than ever, as if her eyelashes were feelers, but she was in transports of delight, and her embarrassment entirely at an end in her admiration, as she exclaimed and discussed with her papa, and by her hearty appreciation made Mr. Rivers for the time forget her plainness. Music followed; Flora played nicely, Meta like a well-taught girl, Ethel went on musing over the engravings. The carriage was announced, and so ended the day in Norman's fairy land. Ethel went home, leaning hard against her papa, talking to him of Raffaele's Madonnas; and looking out at the stars, and thinking how the heavenly beauty of those faces that,

in the prints she had been turning over, seemed to be connected with the glories of the dark-blue sky and glowing stars. 'As one star differeth from another star in glory,' murmured she; 'that was the lesson to-day, papa;' and when she felt him press her hand, she knew he was thinking of that last time she had heard the lesson, when he had not been with her, and her thoughts went with his, though not another word was spoken.

Flora hardly knew when they ceased to talk. She had musings equally engrossing of her own. She saw she was likely to be very intimate with Meta Rivers, and she was roaming away into schemes for not letting the intercourse drop, and hopes of being admitted to many a pleasure, as yet little within her reach—parties, balls, London itself, and, above all, the satisfaction of being admired. The certainty that Mr. Rivers thought her pretty and agreeable, had gratified her all the evening, and if he, with his refined taste, thought so, what would others think? Her only fear was, that Ethel's awkwardness might make an unfavourable impression, but, at least, she said to herself, it was anything but vulgar awkwardness.

Their reflections were interrupted by the fly stopping. It was at a little shop in the outskirts of the town, and Dr. May explained that he wanted to inquire for a patient. He went in for a moment, then came back to desire that they would go home, for he should be detained some little time. No one need sit up for him—he would let himself in.

It seemed a comment on Ethel's thoughts, bringing them back to the present hour. That daily work of homely mercy, hoping for nothing again, was surely the true way of doing service.

CHAPTER XXI.

WATCHMAN. How, if he will not stand?

DOGERRY. Why, then, take no note of him, but let him go.

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING.

DR. MAY promised Margaret that he would see whether the black hole of Cocksmoor was all that Norman depicted it, and, accordingly, he came home that way on Tuesday evening, the next week, much to the astonishment of Richard, who was in the act of so mending the window that it might let in air when open, and keep it out when shut, neither of which purposes had it ever yet answered.

Dr. May walked in, met his daughter's look of delight and surprise, spoke cheerfully to Mrs. Green, a hospital acquaintance of his, like half the rest of the country, and made her smile and courtesy by asking if she was not surprised at such doings in her house; then looked at the children, and patted the head that looked most

fit to pat, inquired who was the best scholar, and offered a penny to whoever could spell copper tea-kettle, which being done by three merry mortals, and having made him extremely popular, he offered Ethel a lift, and carried her off between him and Adams, on whom he now depended for driving him, since Richard was going to Oxford at once.

It was possible to spare him now. Dr. May's arm was as well as he expected it ever would be; he had discarded the sling, and could use his hand again, but the arm was still stiff and weak—he could not stretch it out, nor use it for anything requiring strength, it soon grew tired with writing, and his daughters feared that it ached more than he chose to confess, when they saw it resting in the breast of his waistcoat. Driving he never would have attempted again, even if he could, and he had quite given up carving—he could better bear to sit at the side, than at the bottom of the dinner-table.

Means of carrying Margaret safely had been arranged by Richard, and there was no necessity for longer delaying his going to Oxford, but he was so unwillingly spared by all, as to put him quite into good spirits. Ethel was much concerned to lose him from Cocks-moor; and dreaded hindrances to her going thither without his escort; but she had much trust in having her father on her side, and meant to get authority from him for the propriety of going alone with Mary.

She did not know how Norman had jeopardized her projects, but the danger blew over. Dr. May told Margaret that the place was clean and wholesome, and though more smoky than might be preferred, there was nothing to do anyone in health any harm, especially when the walk there and back was over the fresh moor. He lectured Ethel herself on opening the window, now that she could; and advised Norman to go and spend an hour in the school, that he might learn how pleasant peat-smoke was—a speech Norman did not like at all. The real touchstone of temper is ridicule on a point where we do not choose to own ourselves fastidious, and if it had been from anyone but his father, Norman would not have so entirely kept down his irritation.

Richard passed his examination successfully, and Dr. May wrote himself to express his satisfaction. Nothing went wrong just now except little Tom, who seemed to be justifying Richard's fears of the consequence of exciting his father's anger. At home, he shrank and hesitated at the simplest question if put by his father suddenly; and the appearance of cowardice and prevarication displeasing Dr. May further, rendered his tone louder, and frightened Tom the more, giving his manner an air of sullen reserve that was most unpleasant. At school it was much the same—he kept aloof from Norman, and threw himself more into the opposite faction, by whom

he was shielded from all punishment, except what they chose themselves to inflict on him.

Norman's post as head of the school was rendered more difficult by the departure of his friend Cheviot, who had always upheld his authority; Harvey Anderson did not openly transgress, for he had a character to maintain, but it was well known throughout the school that there was a wide difference between the boys, and that Anderson thought it absurd, superfluous, and troublesome in May not to wink at abuses which appeared to be licensed by long standing. When Edward Anderson, Axworthy, and their set, broke through rules, it was with the understanding that the second boy in the school would support them, if he durst.

The summer, and the cricket season, brought the battle of Ball-hatchet's house to issue. The cricket ground was the field close to it, and for the last two or three years there had been a frequent custom of despatching juniors to his house for tarts and ginger-beer bottles. Norman knew of instances last year in which this had led to serious mischief, and had made up his mind that, at whatever loss of popularity, it was his duty to put a stop to the practice.

He was an ardent cricketer himself, and though the game did not, in anticipation, seem to him to have all the charms of last year, he entered into it with full zest when once engaged. But his eye was on all parts of the field, and especially on the corner by the bridge, and the boys knew him well enough to attempt nothing unlawful within the range of that glance. However, the constant vigilance was a strain too great to be always kept up, and he had reason to believe he was eluded more than once.

At last came a capture, something like that of Tom, one which he could not have well avoided making. The victim was George Larkins, the son of a clergyman in the neighbourhood, a wild, merry varlet, who got into mischief rather for the sake of the fun than from any bad disposition.

His look of consternation was exaggerated into a most comical caricature, in order to hide how much of it was real.

'So you are at that trick, Larkins.'

'There! that bet is lost!' exclaimed Larkins. 'I laid Hill half-a-crown that you would not see me when you were mooning over your verses!'

'Well, I have seen you. And now — ?'

'Come, you would not thrash a fellow when you have just lost him half-a-crown! Single misfortunes never come alone, they say; so there's my money and my credit gone, to say nothing of Ball-hatchet's ginger-beer!'

The boy made such absurd faces, that Norman could hardly help laughing, though he wished to make it a serious affair. 'You know, Larkins, I have given out that such things are not to be. It is a melancholy fact'

'Aye! so you must make an example of me!' said Larkins, pretending to look resigned. 'Better call all the fellows together, hadn't you, and make it more effective? It would be grateful to one's feelings, you know—and June,' added he, with a ridiculous confidential air, 'if you only lay it on soft, I'll take care it makes noise enough. Great cry, little wool, you know.'

'Come with me,' said Norman. 'I'll take care you are example enough. What did you give for those articles?'

'Fifteen-pence half-penny. Rascally dear, isn't it? but the old rogue makes one pay double for the risk! You are making his fortune, you have raised his prices fourfold.'

'I'll take care of that.'

'Why, where are you taking me? Back to him?'

'I am going to gratify your wish to be an example.'

'A gibbet! a gibbet!' cried Larkins. 'I'm to be turned off on the spot where the crime took place—a warning to all beholders. Only let me send home for old Neptune's chain, if you please, sir—if you hang me in the combined watch-chains of the school, I fear they would give way, and defeat the purposes of justice.'

They were by this time at the bridge. 'Come in,' said Norman, to his follower, as he crossed the entrance of the little shop, the first time he had ever been there. A little cringing shrivelled old man stood up in astonishment.

'Mr. May! can I have the pleasure, sir?'

'Mr. Ballhatchet, you know that it is contrary to the rules that there should be any traffic with the school without special permission.'

'Yes, sir—just nothing sir—only when the young gentlemen come here, sir—I'm an old man, sir, and I don't like not to oblige a young gentleman, sir,' pleaded the old man, in a great fright.

'Very likely,' said Norman, 'but I am come to give you fair notice. I am not going to allow the boys here to be continually smuggling spirits into the school.'

'Spirits! bless you, sir, I never thought of no sich a thing! 'Tis nothing in life but ginger-beer—very cooling drink sir, of my wife's making; she had the receipt from her grandmother up in Leicestershire. Won't you taste a bottle, sir?' and he hastily made a cork bounce, and poured it out.

That, of course, was genuine, but Norman was 'up to him,' in school-boy phrase.

'Give me yours, Larkins.'

No pop ensued. Larkins, enjoying the detection, put his hands on his knees, and looked wickedly up in the old man's face to see what was coming.

'Bless me! It is a little flat. I wonder how that happened? I'll be most happy to change it, sir. Wife! what's the meaning of Mr. Larkins' ginger-pop being so flat?'

'It is very curious ginger-beer indeed, Mr. Ballhatchet,' said

Norman;’ and since it is liable to have such strange properties, I cannot allow it to be used any more at the school.’

‘Very well, sir—as you please, sir. You are the first gentleman as has objected, sir.’

‘And, once for all, I give you warning,’ added Norman, ‘that if I have reason to believe you have been obliging the young gentlemen, the magistrates and the trustees of the road shall certainly hear of it.’

‘You would not hurt a poor man, sir, as is drove to it—you as has such a name for goodness.’

‘I have given you warning,’ said Norman. ‘The next time I find any of your bottles in the school fields, your license goes. Now, there are your goods. Give Mr. Larkins back the fifteen-pence. I wonder you are not ashamed of such a charge!’

Having extracted the money, Norman turned to leave the shop. Larkins, triumphant, ‘Ha! there’s Harrison!’ as the tutor rode by, and they touched their caps. ‘How he stared! My eyes! June, you’ll be had up for dealing with old Ball!’ and he went into an ecstasy of laughing. ‘You’ve settled him, I believe. Well, is justice satisfied?’

‘It would be no use thrashing you,’ said Norman, laughing, as he leant against the parapet of the bridge, and pinched the boy’s ear. ‘There’s nothing to be got out of you but chaff.’

Larkins was charmed with the compliment.

‘But I’ll tell you what, Larkins, I can’t think how a fellow like you can go and give in to these sneaking, underhand tricks that make you ashamed to look one in the face.’

‘It is only for the fun of it.’

‘Well, I wish you would find your fun some other way. Come, Larkins, recollect yourself a little—you have a home not so far off. How do you think your father and mother would fancy seeing you reading the book you had yesterday, or coming out of Ballhatchet’s with a bottle of spirits, called by a false name?’

Larkins pinched his fingers; home was a string that could touch him, but it seemed beneath him to own it. At that moment a carriage approached, the boy’s whole face lighted up, and he jumped forward. ‘Our own!’ he cried. ‘There she is!’

She was, of course, his mother; and Norman, though turning hastily away that his presence might prove no restraint, saw the boy fly over the door of the open carriage, and could have sobbed at the thought of what that meeting was.

‘Who was that with you?’ asked Mrs. Larkins, when she had obtained leave to have her boy with her, while she did her shopping.

‘That was May senior, our Dux.’

‘Was it? I am very glad you should be with him, my dear George. He is very kind to you, I hope?’

‘He is a jolly good fellow,’ said Larkins, sincerely, though by no means troubling himself as to the appropriateness of the eulogy

nor thinking it necessary to explain to his mother the terms of the conversation.

It was not fruitless ; Larkins did avoid mischief when it was not extremely inviting, was more amenable to May senior, and having been put in mind by him of his home, was not ashamed to bring the thought to the aid of his eyes, when, on Sunday, during a long sermon of Mr. Ramsden's, he knew that Axworthy was making the grimace which irresistibly incited him to make a still finer one.

And Ballhatchet was so much convinced of 'that there young May' being in earnest, that he assured his persuasive customers that it was as much as his license was worth, to supply them.

Evil and insubordination were more easily kept under than Norman had expected, when he first made up his mind to the struggle. Firmness had so far carried the day, and the power of manful assertion of the right had been proved, contrary to Cheviot's parting auguries, that he would only make himself disliked, and do no good.

The whole of the school was extremely excited this summer by a proceeding of Mr. Tomkins, the brewer, who suddenly closed up the foot-way called Randall's Alley, declaring that there was no right of passage through a certain field at the back of his brewery. Not only the school, but the town was indignant, and the Mays especially so. It had been the Doctor's way to school forty years ago, and there were recollections connected with it, that made him regard it with personal affection. Norman, too, could not bear to lose it ; he had not entirely conquered his reluctance to pass that spot in the High Street, and the loss of the alley would be a positive deprivation to him. Almost every native of Stoneborough felt strongly the encroachment of the brewer, and the boys, of course, carried the sentiment to exaggeration.

The propensity to public speaking perhaps added to the excitement, for Norman May, and Harvey Anderson, for once in unison, each made a vehement harangue in the school-court—Anderson's a fine specimen of the village Hampden style, about Britons never suffering indignities, and free-born Englishmen swelling at injuries.

'That they do, my hearty,' interjected Larkins, pointing to an inflamed eye that had not returned to its right dimensions. However, Anderson went on unmoved by the under titter, and demonstrated, to the full satisfaction of all the audience, that nothing could be more illegal and unfounded than the brewer's claims.

Then came a great outburst from Norman, with all his father's headlong vehemence ; the way was the right of the town, the walk had been trodden by their forefathers for generations past—it had been made by the good old generous-hearted man who loved his town and townspeople, and would have heard with shame and anger of a stranger, a new inhabitant, a grasping radical, caring, as radicals always did, for no rights, but for their own chance of unjust gains, coming here to Stoneborough to cut them off from their own path.

He talk of liberalism and the rights of the poor! He who cut off Randall's poor old creatures in the almshouse from their short way and then came some stories of his oppression as a poor-law guardian, which greatly aggravated the wrath of the speaker and the audience, though otherwise they did not exactly bear on the subject. 'What would old Nicholas Randall say to these nineteenth-century doings!' finished Norman.

'Down with them!' cried a voice from the throng, probably Larkins's; but there was no desire to investigate, it was the universal sentiment. 'Down with it! Hurrah, we'll have our foot-path open again! Down with the fences! Britons never shall be slaves!' as Larkins finally ejaculated.

'That's the way to bring it to bear!' said Harvey Anderson. 'See if he dares to bring an action against us. Hurrah!'

'Yes, that's the way to settle it,' said Norman. 'Let's have it down. It is an oppressive, arbitrary, shameful proceeding, and we'll show him we won't submit to it!'

Carried along by the general feeling, the whole troop of boys dashed shouting up to the barricade at the entrance of the field, and levelled it with the ground. A handkerchief was fastened to the top of one of the stakes, and waved over the brewhouse wall, and some of the boys were for picking up stones and dirt, and launching them over, in hopes of spoiling the beer; but Norman put a stop to this, and brought them back to the school-yard, still in a noisy state of exultation.

It cooled a little by-and-by under the doubt how their exploit would be taken. At home, Norman found it already known, and his father half glad, half vexed, enjoying the victory over Tomkins, yet a little uneasy on his son's behalf. 'What will Dr. Hoxton say to the *dux*?' said he. 'I didn't know he was to be *dux* in mischief as well as out of it.'

'You can't call it mischief, papa, to resent an unwarranted encroachment of our rights by such an old ruffian as that. One's blood is up to think of the things he has done!'

'He richly deserves it, no doubt,' said the Doctor, 'and yet I wish you had been out of the row. If there is any blame, you will be the first it will light on.'

'I am glad of it, that is but just. Anderson and I seem to have stirred it up—if it wanted stirring—for it was in every fellow there; indeed, I had no notion it was coming to this when I began.'

'Oratory,' said the Doctor, smiling. 'Ha, Norman! Think a little another time, my boy, before you take the law into your own hands, or, what is worse, into a lot of hands you can't control for good, though you may excite them to harm.'

Dr. Hoxton did not come into school at the usual hour, and, in

the course of the morning, sent for May senior to speak to him in his study

He looked very broad, awful, and dignified, as he informed him that Mr. Tomkins had just been with him to complain of the damage that had been done, and he appeared extremely displeased that the *Duz* should have been no check on such proceedings.

'I am sorry, sir,' said Norman, 'but I believe it was the general feeling that he had no right to stop the alley, and, therefore, that it could not be wrong to break it down.'

'Whether he has a right or not, is not a question to be settled by you. So I find that you, whose proper office it is to keep order, have been inflaming the mischievous and aggressive spirit amongst the others. I am surprised at you; I thought you were more to be depended upon, May, in your position.'

Norman coloured a good deal, and simply answered, 'I am sorry, sir.'

'Take care, then, that nothing of the kind happens again,' said Dr. Hoxton, who was very fond of him, and did not find fault with him willingly.

That the first inflammatory discourse had been made by Anderson, did not appear to be known—he only came in for the general reprimand given to the school.

It was reported the following evening, just as the town boys turned out to go to their homes, that 'old Tomkins had his fence up five times higher than before.'

'Have at him again, say I!' exclaimed Axworthy. 'What business has he coming stopping up ways that were made before he was born?'

'We shall catch it from the doctor if we do,' said Edward Anderson. 'He looked in no end of a rage yesterday when he talked about the credit of the school.'

'Who cares for the credit of the school?' said the elder Anderson; 'we are out of the school now—we are townsmen—Stoneborough boys—citizens not bound to submit to injustice. No, no, the old rogue knew it would not stand if it was brought into court, so he brings down old Hoxton on us instead—a dirty trick he deserves to be punished for.'

And there was a general shout and yell in reply.

'Anderson,' said Norman, 'you had better not excite them again, they are ripe for mischief. It will go further than it did yesterday—don't you see?'

Anderson could not afford to get into a scrape without May to stand before him, and rather sulkily he assented.

'It is of no use to rave about old Tomkins,' proceeded Norman, in his style of popular oratory. 'If it is illegal, some one will go to law about it, and we shall have our alley again. We have shown him our mind once, and that is enough; if we let him alone now

he will see 'tis only because we are ordered, not for his sake. It would be just putting him in the right, and may be winning his cause for him, to use any more violence. There's law for you, Anderson. So now no more about it—let us all go home like rational fellows. August, where's August?'

Tom was not visible—he generally avoided going home with his brother, and Norman having seen the boys divide into two or three little parties, as their roads lay homewards, found he had an hour of light for an expedition of his own, along the bank of the river. He had taken up botany with much ardour, and sharing the study with Margaret was a great delight to both. There was a report that the rare yellow bog-bean grew in a meadow about a mile and a half up the river, and thither he was bound, extremely enjoying the summer evening walk, as the fresh dewey coolness sunk on all around, and the noises of the town were mellowed by distance and the sun's last beams slanted on the green meadows, and the May-flies danced and dragon-flies darted, and fish rose or leapt high in the air, or showed their spotted sides, and opened and shut their gills, as they rested in the clear water, and the evening breeze rustled in the tall reeds, and brought fragrance from the fresh-mown hay.

It was complete enjoyment to Norman after his day's study, and the rule and watch over the unruly crowd of boys, and he walked and wandered, and collected plants for Margaret till the sun was down, and the grasshoppers chirped clamorously, while the fern-owl purred, and the beetle hummed, and the skimming swallows had given place to the soft-winged bat, and the large white owl floating over the fields as it moused in the long grass.

The summer twilight was sobering every tint, when, as Norman crossed the cricket-field, he heard, in the distance, a loud shout. He looked up, and it seemed to him that he saw some black specks dancing in the forbidden field, and something like the waving of a flag, but it was not light enough to be certain, and he walked quickly home.

The front door was fastened, and, while he was waiting to be let in, Mr. Harrison walked by, and called out, 'You are late at home to-night—it is half-past nine.'

'I have been taking a walk, sir.'

A good-night was the answer, as he was admitted. Everyone in the drawing-room looked up, and exclaimed, as he entered, 'Where's Tom?'

'What! he is not come home?'

'No! Was he not with you?'

'I missed him after school. I was persuaded he was come home. I have been to look for the yellow bog-bean. There, Margaret. Had not I better go and look for him?'

'Yes, do,' said Dr. May. 'The boy is never off one's mind.'

A sort of instinctive dread directed Norman's steps down the

open portion of Randall's Alley, and, voices growing louder as he came nearer, confirmed his suspicions. The fence at this end was down, and, on entering the field, a gleam of light met his eye on the ground—a cloud of smoke, black figures were flitting round it, pushing brands into red places, and feeding the bonfire.

'What have you been doing?' exclaimed Norman. 'You have got yourselves into a tremendous scrape!'

A peal of laughter, and shout of 'Randall and Stoneborough for ever!' was the reply.

'August! May junior! Tom! answer me! Is he here?' asked Norman, not solicitous to identify anyone.

But gruff voices broke in upon them. 'There they are, nothing like 'em for mischief.'

'Come, young gentlemen,' said a policeman, 'be off, if you please. We don't want to have none of you at the Station to-night.'

A general hurry-scurry ensued. Norman alone, strong in innocence, walked quietly away, and, as he came forth from the darkness of the Alley, beheld something scouring away before him, in the direction of home. It popped in at the front door before him, but was not in the drawing-room. He strode up-stairs, called but was not answered, and found, under the bed-clothes, a quivering mass, consisting of Tom with all his clothes on, fully persuaded that it was the policeman who was pursuing him.

CHAPTER XXII.

Oh Life, without thy chequered scene,
Of right and wrong, of weal and woe,
Success and failure, could a ground
For magnanimity be found?

WORDSWORTH.

DOCTOR MAY was called for late the next day, Friday, and spent some time in one of the houses near the river. It was nearly eight o'clock when he came away, and he lingered, looking towards the school, in hopes of a walk home with his boys.

Presently he saw Norman come out from under the archway, his cap drawn over his face, and step, gesture, and manner, betraying that something was seriously wrong. He came up almost to his father without seeing him, until startled by his exclamation, 'Norman—why Norman, what's the matter?'

Norman's lips quivered, and his face was pale—he seemed as if he could not speak.

'Where's Tom?' said the doctor, much alarmed. 'Has he got into disgrace about this business of Tomkins? That boy—'

'He has only got an imposition,' interrupted Norman. 'No, it is not that—it is myself,—' and it was only with a gulp and strug-

gle that he brought out the words, 'I am turned down in the school.'

The Doctor started back a step or two, aghast. 'What—how—speak, Norman. What have you done?'

'Nothing!' said Norman, recovering, in the desire to re-assure his father, 'nothing!'

'That's right,' said the Doctor, breathing freely, 'What's the meaning of it . . . a misunderstanding?'

'Yes,' said Norman, with bitterness. 'It is all Anderson's doing—a word from him would have set all straight—but he would not—I believe, from my heart, he held his tongue to get me down, that he might have the Randall!'

'We'll see you righted,' said the Doctor, eagerly. 'Come, tell me the whole story, Norman. Is it about this unlucky business?'

'Yes. The town-fellows were all up about it last evening, when we came out of school. Anderson senior himself began to put them up to having the fence down again. Yes, that he did—I remember his very words—that Tomkins could not bring it into Court, and so set old Hoxton at us. Well, I told them it would not do,—thought I had settled them—saw them off home—yes, Simpson, and Benson, and Grey, up the High Street, and the others their way. I only left Axworthy going into a shop when I set off on my walk. What could a fellow do more? How was I to know that that Axworthy would get them together again and take them to this affair—pull up the stakes—saw them down—for they were hard to get down—shy all sorts of things over into the court—hoot at old Tomkins's man, when he told them to be off—and make a bonfire of the sticks at last?'

'And Harvey Anderson was there?'

'No—not he. He is too sharp—born and bred an attorney as he is—he talked them up to the mischief when my back was turned, and then sneaked quietly home, quite innocent, and out of the scrape.'

'But Doctor Hoxton can never entertain a suspicion that you had anything to do with it.'

'Yes, he does though. He thinks I incited them, and Tomkins and the policeman declare I was there in the midst of the row—and not one of these fellows will explain how I came at the last to look for Tom.'

'Not Tom himself?—'

'He did try to speak, poor little fellow, but, after the other affair, his word goes for nothing, and so, it seems, does mine. I did think Hoxton would have trusted me!'

'And did not he?' exclaimed Dr. May.

'He did not in so many words accuse me of—of—but he told me he had serious charges brought against me—Mr. Harrison had seen me at Ballhatchet's, setting an example of disregard to rules

—and, again, Mr. Harrison saw me coming in at a late hour last night. “I know he did,” I said, and I explained where I had been, and they asked for proofs! I could hardly answer, from surprise, at their not seeming to believe me, but I said you could answer for my having come in with the flowers for my sister.’

‘To be sure I will—I’ll go this instant—’ he was turning.

‘It is of no use, papa, to-night; Dr. Hoxton has a dinner-party.’

‘He is always having parties. I wish he would mind them less, and his business more. You disbelieved! but I’ll see justice done you, Norman, the first thing to-morrow. Well—’

‘Well then, I said, old Ballhatchet could tell that I crossed the bridge at the very time they were doing this pretty piece of work, for he was sitting smoking in his porch when I went home, and, would you believe it? the old rascal would not remember who passed that evening! It is all his malice and revenge—nothing else!’

‘Why—what have you been doing to him?’

Norman shortly explained the ginger-beer story, and adding, ‘Cheviot told me I should get nothing but ill-will, and so I have—all those town fellows turn against me now, and though they know as well as possible how it was, they won’t say a word to right me, just out of spite, because I have stopped them from all the mischief I could!’

‘Well, then—’

‘They asked me whether—since I allowed that I had been there at last—I had dispersed the boys. I said no, I had no time. Then they desired to know who was there, and that I had not seen; it was all dark, and there had not been a moment, and if I guessed, it was no affair of mine to say. So they ordered me down, and had up Ned Anderson, and one or two more who were known to have been in the riot, and then they consulted a good while, and sent for me; Mr. Wilmot was for me, I am sure, but Harrison was against me. Docter Hoxton sat there, and made me one of his addresses. He said he would not enter on the question whether I had been present at the repetition of the outrage, as he called it, but what was quite certain was, that I had abused my authority and influence in the school; I had been setting a bad example, and breaking the rules about Ballhatchet, and so far from repressing mischief, I had been the foremost in it, making inflammatory harangues, leading them to commit violence the first time, and the next, if not actually taking part in it personally, at any rate, not preventing it. In short, he said it was clear I had not weight enough for my post—it was some excuse I had been raised to it so young—but it was necessary to show that proficiency in studies did not compensate for disregard of discipline, and so he turned me down below the first six! So there’s another May in disgrace!’

'It shall not last—it shall not last, my boy,' said Dr. May, pressing Norman's arm; 'I'll see you righted. Dr. Hoxton shall hear the whole story. I am not for fathers interfering in general, but if ever there was a case, this is! Why, it is almost actionable—injuring your whole prospects in life, and all because he will not take the trouble to make an investigation! It is a crying shame.'

'Every fellow in the school knows how it was,' said Norman; 'and plenty of them would be glad to tell, if they had only the opportunity; but he asked no one but those two or three worst fellows that were at the fire, and they would not tell, on purpose. The school will go to destruction now—they'll get their way, and all I have been striving for is utterly undone.'

'You setting a bad example! Dr. Hoxton little knows what you have been doing. It is a mockery, as I have always said, to see that old fellow sit wrapped up in his pomposity, eating his good dinners, and knowing no more what goes on among his boys than this umbrella! But he will listen to me—and we'll make those boys confess the whole—aye, and have up Ballhatchet himself, to say what your traffic with him was; and we will see what old Hoxton says to you then, Norman.'

Dr. May and his son felt keenly and spoke strongly. There was so much of sympathy and fellow-feeling between them, that there was no backwardness on Norman's part in telling his whole trouble, with more confidence than school-boys often show towards their fathers, and Dr. May entered into the mortification as if he were still at school. They did not go into the house, but walked long up and down the garden, working themselves up into, if possible, stronger indignation, and concerting the explanation for to-morrow, when Dr. May meant to go at once to the head master, and make him attend to the true version of the story, appealing to Harvey Anderson himself, Larkins, and many others, for witnesses. There could be hardly a doubt that Norman would be thus exculpated; but, if Dr. Hoxton would not see things in their true light, Dr. May was ready to take him away at once, rather than see him suffer injustice.

Still, though comforted by his father's entire reliance, Norman was suffering severely under the sense of indignity, and grieved that Dr. Hoxton, and the other masters, should have believed him guilty—that name of May could never again boast of being without reproach. To be in disgrace stung him to the quick, even though undeservedly, and he could not bear to go in, meet his sisters, and be pitied. 'There's no need they should know of it,' said he, when the Minster clock pealing ten, obliged them to go in doors, and his father agreed. They bade each other good night, with the renewal of the promise that Dr. Hoxton should be forced to hear Norman's vindication the first thing to-morrow, Harvey Anderson be disappointed of what he meanly triumphed in, and Norman be again in his post at the head of the school, in more honour and

confidence than ever, putting down evil, and making Stonborough what it ought to be.

As Dr. May lay awake in the summer's morning, meditating on his address to Dr. Hoxton, he heard the unwelcome sound of a ring at the bell, and, in a few minutes, a note was brought to him.

'Tell Adams to get the gig ready—I'll let him know whether he is to go with me.'

And, in a few minutes, the Doctor opened Norman's door, and found him dressed, and standing by the window, reading. 'What, up already, Norman? I came to tell you that our affairs must wait till the afternoon. It is very provoking, for Hoxton may be gone out, but Mr. Lake's son, at Groveswood, has an attack on the head, and I must go at once. It is a couple of dozen miles off or more. I have hardly ever been there, and it may keep me all day.'

'Shall you go in the gig? Shall I drive you?' said Norman, looking rather blank.

'That's what I thought of, if you like it. I thought you would sooner be out of the way.'

'Thank you—yes, papa. Shall I come and help you to finish dressing?'

'Yes, do, thank you; it will hasten matters. Only, first order in some breakfast. What makes you up so early? Have not you slept?'

'Not much—it has been such a hot night.'

'And you have a head-ache. Well, we will find a cure for that before the day is over. I have settled what to say to old Hoxton.'

Before another quarter of an hour had passed, they were driving through the deep lanes, the long grass thickly laden with morning dew, which beaded the webs of the spiders, and rose in clouds of mist under the influence of the sun's rays. There was stillness in the air at first, then the morning sounds, the laborer going forth, the world wakening to life, the opening houses, the children coming out to school. In spite of the tumult of feeling, Norman could not but be soothed and refreshed by the new and fair morning scene, and both minds quitted the school politics, as Dr. May talked of past enjoyment of walks or drives home in early dawn, the more delicious after a sad watch in a sick room, and told of the fair sights he had seen at such unwonted hours.

They had far to go, and the heat of the day had come on before they entered the place of their destination. It was a woodland village, built on a nook in the side of the hill, sloping greenly to the river, and shut in by a white gate, which seemed to gather all in one, the little low old-fashioned church, its yard, shaded with trees, and enclosed by long white rails; the parsonage, covered with climbing plants and in the midst of a gay garden; and one or two cottages. The woods cast a cool shadow, and, in the meadows by the river, rose cocks of new-made hay; there was an air of abiding

serenity about the whole place, save that there stood an old man by the gate, evidently watching for the physician's carriage; and where the sun fell on that parsonage-house was a bedroom window wide open, with the curtains drawn.

'Thank Heaven, you are come, Sir,' said the old man—'he is fearfully bad.'

Norman knew young Lake, who had been a senior boy when he first went to school, was a Randall scholar, and had borne an excellent character, and highly distinguished himself at the University. And now, by all accounts, he seemed to be dying—in the height of honour and general esteem. Dr. May went into the house, the old man took the horse, and Norman lingered under the trees in the church-yard, watching the white curtains now and then puffed by the fitful summer breeze, as he lay on the turf in the shade, under the influence of the gentle sadness around, resting, mind and body, from the tossing tumultuous passionate sensations that had kept him restless and miserable through the hot night.

He waited long—one hour, two hours had passed away, but he was not impatient, and hardly knew how long the time had been before his father and Mr. Lake came out of the house together, and, after they parted, Dr. May summoned him. He of course asked first for the patient. 'Not quite so hopeless as at first,' and the reasons for having been kept so long were detailed, with many circumstances of the youth's illness, and the parents' resignation, by which Dr. May was still too deeply touched to have room in his mind for anything besides.

They were more than half-way home, and a silence had succeeded the conversation about the Lake family, when Norman spoke:

'Papa, I have been thinking about it, and I believe it would be better to let it alone, if you please.'

'Not apply to Dr. Hoxton!' exclaimed his father.

'Well, I think not. I have been considering it, and it does hardly seem to me the right thing. You see, if I had not you close at hand, this could never be explained, and it seems rather hard upon Anderson, who has no father, and the other fellows, who have theirs further off—'

'Right, Norman, that is what my father before me always said, and the way I have always acted myself; much better let a few trifles go on not just as one would wish, than be for ever interfering. But I really think this is a case for it, and I don't think you ought to let yourself be influenced by the fear of any party-spirit.'

'It is not only that, papa—I have been thinking a good deal to-day, and there are other reasons. Of course I should wish Dr. Hoxton to know that I spoke the truth about that walk, and I hope you will let him know, as I appealed to you. But, on cooler thoughts, I don't believe Dr. Hoxton could seriously suspect me of such a thing as that, and it was not on that ground that I am

turned down, but that I did not keep up sufficient discipline, and allowed the outrage as he calls it. Now, you know, that is, after a fashion, true. If I had not gone on like an ass the other day, and incited them to pull down the fences, they would not have done it afterwards, and perhaps, I ought to have kept on guard longer. It was my fault, and we can't deny it.'

Dr. May made a restless, reluctant movement. 'Well, well, I suppose it was—but it was just as much Harvey Anderson's—and is he to get the scholarship because he has added meanness to the rest?'

'He was not Dux,' said Norman, with a sigh. 'It was more shabby than I thought was even in him. But I don't know that the feeling about him is not one reason. There has always been a rivalry and bitterness between us two, and if I were to get the upper hand now, by means not in the usual course, such as the fellows would think ill of, it would be worse than ever, and I should always feel guilty and ashamed to look at him.'

'Over-refining, Norman,' muttered Dr. May.

'Besides, don't you remember, when his father died, how glad you and everyone were to get him a nomination, and it was said that if he gained a scholarship, it would be such a relief to poor Mrs. Anderson? Now he has this chance, it does seem hard to deprive her of it. I should not like to know that I had done so.'

'Whew!' the Doctor gave a considering whistle.

'You could not make it straight, papa, without explaining about the dealing with Ballhatchet, and that would be unfair to them all, even the old rogue himself; for I promised to say nothing about former practices, as long as he did not renew them.'

'Well! I don't want to compromise you, Norman. You know your own ground best, but I don't like it at all. You don't know the humiliation of disgrace. Those who have thought highly of you, now thinking you changed—I don't know how to bear it for you.'

'I don't mind anything while you trust me,' said Norman, eagerly; 'not much I mean, except Mr. Wilmot. You must judge, papa, and do as you please.'

'No, you must judge, Norman. Your confidence in me ought not to be a restraint. It has always been an understood thing that, what you say at home is, as if it had not been said, as regards my dealings with the masters.'

'I know, papa. Well, I'll tell you what brought me to this. I tumbled about all night in a rage, when I thought how they had served me, and of Hoxton's believing it all, and how he might only half give in to your representation, and then I gloried in Anderson's coming down from his height, and being seen in his true colours. So it went on till morning came, and I got up. You know you gave me my mother's little Thomas à Kempis. I always read a

bit every morning. To-day it was, "Of four things that bring much inward peace." And what do you think they were?

"Be desirous, my son, to do the will of another rather than thine own.

"Choose always to have less rather than more.

"Seek always the lowest place, and to be inferior to everyone.

"Wish always and pray that the will of God may be wholly fulfilled in thee."

"I liked them the more, because it was just like her last reading with us, and like that letter.—Well, then I wondered as I lay on the grass at Groveswood, whether she would have thought it best for me to be reinstated, and I found out that I should have been rather afraid of what you might say when she had talked it over with you."

Dr. May smiled a little at the simplicity with which this last was said, but his smile ended in one of his heavy sighs. "So you took her for your counsellor, my boy. That was the way to find out what was right."

"Well, there was something in the place, and, in watching poor Lake's windows, that made me not able to dwell so much on getting on, and having prizes and scholarships. I thought that caring for those had been driven out of me, and you know I never felt as if it were my right when I was made Dux; but now I find it is all come back. It does not do for me to be first; I have been what she called elated, and been more peremptory than need with the lower boys, and gone on in my old way with Richard, and so I suppose this disgrace has come to punish me. I wish it were not disgrace, because of our name at school, and because it will vex Harry so much; but since it is come, considering all things, I suppose I ought not to struggle to justify myself at other people's expense."

His eyes were so dazzled with tears, that he could hardly see to drive, nor did his father speak at first. "I can't say anything against it, Norman, but I am sorry, and one thing more you should consider. If Dr. Hoxton should view this absurd business in the way he seems to do, it will stand in your way for ever in testimonials, if you try for anything else."

"Do you think it will interfere with my having a Confirmation ticket?"

"Why no, I should not think—such a boyish escapade could be no reason for refusing you one."

"Very well then, it had better rest. If there should be any difficulty about my being Confirmed, of course we will explain it."

"I wish every one showed themselves as well prepared!" half-muttered the Doctor; then, after long musing, "well, Norman, I give up the scholarship. Poor Mrs. Anderson wants it more than we do, and if the boy is a shabby fellow, the more he wants a decent

education. But what do you say to this? I make Hoxton do you full justice, and reinstate you in your proper place, and then I take you away at once—send you to a tutor—anything, till the end of the long vacation.'

'Thank you,' said Norman, pausing; 'I don't know, papa. I am very much obliged to you, but I think it would hardly do. You would be uncomfortable at seeming to quarrel with Dr. Hoxton, and it would be hardly creditable for me to go off in anger.'

'You are right, I believe,' said Dr. May. 'You judge wisely, though I should not have ventured to ask it of you. But what is to become of the discipline of the school? Is that all to go to the dogs?'

'I could not do anything with them if I were restored in this way; they would be more set against me. It is bad enough as it is, but, even for my own peace, I believe it is better to leave it alone. All my comfort in school is over, I know!' and he sighed deeply.

'It is a most untoward business!' said the Doctor. 'I am very sorry your school-days should be clouded—but it can't be helped, and you will work yourself into a character again. You are full young, and can stay for the next Randall.'

Norman felt as if, while his father looked at him as he now did, the rest of the world were nothing to him; but, perhaps, the driving past the school brought him to a different mind, for he walked into the house slowly and dejectedly.

He told his own story to Ethel, in the garden, not without much difficulty, so indignant were her exclamations; and it was impossible to make her see that his father's interference would put him in an awkward position among the boys. She would argue vehemently that she could not bear Mr. Wilmot to think ill of him, that it was a great shame of Dr. Hoxton, and that it was dreadful to let such a boy as Harvey Anderson go unpunished. 'I really do think it is quite wrong of you to give up your chance of doing good, and leave him in his evil ways!' That was all the comfort she gave Norman, and she walked in to pour out a furious grumbling upon Margaret.

Dr. May had been telling the elder ones, and they were in conversation after he had left them—Margaret talking with animation, and Flora sitting over her drawing, uttering reluctant assents.

Has he told you, poor fellow?' asked Margaret.

'Yes,' said Ethel. 'Was there ever such a shame?'

'That is just what I say,' observed Flora. 'I cannot see why the Andersons are to have a triumph over all of us.'

'I used to think Harvey the best of the two,' said Ethel. 'Now, I think he is a great deal the worst. Taking advantage of such a mistake as this! How will he ever look Norman in the face.'

'Really,' said Margaret, 'I see no use in aggravating ourselves by talking of the Andersons.'

'I can't think how papa can consent,' proceeded Flora. 'I am sure, if I were in his place, I should not!'

'Papa is so much pleased with dear Norman's behaviour, that it quite makes up for all the disappointment,' said Margaret. 'Besides, he is very much obliged to him in one way; he would not have liked to have to battle the matter with Dr. Hoxton. He spoke of Norman's great good judgment.'

'Yes, Norman can persuade papa to anything,' said Flora.

'Yes, I wish papa had not yielded,' said Ethel. 'It would have been just as noble in dear Norman, and we should not have the apparent disgrace.'

'Perhaps it is best as it is, after all,' said Flora.

'Why, how do you mean?' said Ethel.

'I think very likely things might have come out. Now, don't look furious, Ethel. Indeed, I can't help it, but really I don't think it is explicable why Norman should wish to hush it up, unless there were something behind!'

'Flora!' cried Ethel, too much shocked to bring out another word.

'If you are unfortunate enough to have such suspicions,' said Margaret, quietly, 'I think it would be better to be silent.'

'As if you did not know Norman!' stammered Ethel.

'Well,' said Flora, 'I don't wish to think so. You know I did not hear Norman himself, and when papa gives his vehement accounts of things, it always puzzles us of the cooler-minded sort.'

'It is as great a shame as ever I heard!' cried Ethel, recovering her utterance. 'Who would you trust, if not your own father and brother?'

'Yes, yes,' said Flora, not by any means wishing to displease her sisters. 'If there is such a thing as an excess of generosity, it is sure to be among ourselves. I only know it does not suit me. It will make us all uncomfortable whenever we meet the Andersons or Mr. Wilmot, or anyone else, and as to such tenderness to Harvey Anderson, I think it is thrown away.'

'Thrown away on the object, perhaps,' said Margaret, 'but not on Norman.'

'To be sure,' broke out Ethel. 'Better be than seem! Oh, dear! I am sorry I was vexed with dear old June when he told me. I had rather have him now than if he had gained everything, and everyone was praising him—that I had! Harvey Anderson is welcome to be Dux and Landall scholar for what I care, while Norman is—while he is, just what we thought of the last time we read that Gospel—you know, Margaret?'

'He is—that he is,' said Margaret, 'and indeed, it is most beautiful to see how what has happened has brought him at once to what she wished, when, perhaps, otherwise it would have been a work of long time.'

Ethel was entirely consoled. Flora thought of the words '*tête exaltée*,' and considered herself alone to have sober sense enough to see things in a true light—not that she went the length of believing that Norman had any underhand motives, but she thought it very discreet in her to think a prudent father would not have been satisfied with such a desire to avoid investigation.

Dr. May would not trust himself to enter on the subject with Dr. Hoxton in conversation; he only wrote a note.

'Dear Dr. Hoxton,

'June 16th.

'My son has appealed to me to confirm his account of himself on Thursday evening last. I therefore distinctly state that he came in at half-past nine, with his hands full of plants from the river, and that he then went out again, by my desire, to look for his little brother.

'Yours, very truly,
'R. MAY.'

A long answer came in return, disclaiming all doubt of Norman's veracity, and explaining Dr. Hoxton's grounds for having degraded him. There had been misconduct in the school, he said, for some time past, and he did not consider that it was any very serious reproach to a boy of Norman's age, that he had not had weight enough to keep up his authority, and had been carried away by the general feeling. It had been necessary to make an example for the sake of principle, and though very sorry it should have fallen on one of such high promise and general good conduct, Dr. Hoxton trusted that it would not be any permanent injury to his prospects, as his talents had raised him to his former position in the school so much earlier than usual.

'The fact was,' said Dr. May, 'that old Hoxton did it in a passion, feeling he must punish somebody, and now, finding there's no uproar about it, he begins to be sorry. I won't answer this note. I'll stop after church to-morrow and shake hands, and that will show we don't bear malice.'

What Mr. Wilmot might think, was felt by all to affect them more nearly. Ethel wanted to hear that he declared his complete conviction of Norman's innocence, and was disappointed to find that he did not once allude to the subject. She was only consoled by Margaret's conjecture that, perhaps, he thought the head-master had been hasty, and could not venture to say so—he saw into people's characters, and it was notorious that it was just what Dr. Hoxton did not.

Tom had spent the chief of that Saturday in reading a novel borrowed from Axworthy, keeping out of sight of everyone. All Sunday he avoided Norman more scrupulously than ever, and again on Monday. That day was a severe trial to Norman; the taking the lower place, and the sense that, excel as much as ever he might in his studies, it would not avail to restore him to his former place.

were more unpleasant, when it came to the point, than he had expected.

He saw the cold manner, so different from the readiness with which his tasks had always been met, certain as they were of being well done; he found himself among the common herd whom he had passed so triumphantly, and, for a little while, he had no heart to exert himself.

This was conquered by the strong will and self-rebuke for having merely craved for applause, but, in the play-ground, he found himself still alone—the other boys who had been raised by his fall, shrank from intercourse with one whom they had injured by their silence, and the Andersons, who were wont to say the Mays carried every tale home, and who still almost expected interference from Dr. May, hardly believed their victory secure, and the younger one, at least, talked spitefully, and triumphed in the result of May's meddling and troublesome over strictness. 'Such prigs always come to a downfall,' was the sentiment.

Norman found himself left out of everything, and stood dispirited and weary on the bank of the river, wishing for Harry, wishing for Cheviot, wishing that he had been able to make a friend who would stand by him, thinking it could not be worse if he had let his father reinstate him—and a sensation of loneliness and injustice hung heavy at his heart.

His first interruption was a merry voice. 'I say, June, there's no end of river cray-fish under that bank,' and Larkins' droll face was looking up at him, from that favourite position, half-stooping, his hands on his knees, his expression of fun trying to conceal his real anxiety and sympathy.

Norman turned and smiled, and looked for the cray-fish, and, at the same time, became aware of Hector Ernescliffe watching for an opportunity to say, 'I have a letter from Alan.' He knew they wanted, as far as little boys ventured to seek after one so much their elder, to show themselves his friends, and he was grateful; he roused himself to hear about Alan's news, and found it was important—his great friend, Captain Gordon, had got a ship, and hoped to be able to take him, and this might lead to Harry's going with him. Then Norman applied himself to the capture of cray-fish, and Larkins grew so full of fun and drollery, that the hours of recreation passed off less gloomily than they had begun.

If only his own brother would have been his adherent! But he saw almost nothing of Tom. Day after day he missed him, he was off before him in going and returning from school, and when he caught a sight of his face, it looked harassed, pale, and miserable, stealing anxious glances after him, yet shrinking from his eye. But, at the same time, Norman did not see him mingling with his former friends, and could not make out how he disposed of himself. To be thus continually shunned by his own brother, even when the

general mass were returning to ordinary terms, became so painful, that Norman was always on the watch to seek for one more conversation with him.

He caught him at last in the evening, just as they were going home. 'Tom, why are you running away? Come with me,' said he, authoritatively; and Tom obeyed in trembling.

Norman led the way to the meads. 'Tom,' said he, 'do not let this go on. Why do you serve me in this way? You surely need not turn against me,' he said, with pleading melancholy in his voice.

It was not needed. Tom had flung himself upon the grass, and was in an agony of crying, even before he had finished the words.

'Tom, Tom! what is the matter? Have they been bullying you again? Look up, and tell me—what is it? You know I can stand by you still, if you'll only let me;' and Norman sat by him on the grass, and raised his face by a sort of force, but the kind words only brought more piteous sobs. It was a long time before they diminished enough to let him utter a word, but Norman went on patiently consoling and inquiring, sure, at least, that here had broken down the sullenness that had always repelled him.

At last came the words, 'Oh! I cannot bear it. It is all my doing!'

'What—how—you don't mean this happening to me? It is not your doing, August—what fancy is this?'

'O yes, it is,' said Tom, his voice cut short by gasps, the remains of the sobs. 'They would not hear me! I tried to tell them how you told them not, and sent them home. I tried to tell about Ballhatchet—but—but they wouldn't—they said if it had been Harry, they would have attended—but they would not believe me. Oh! if Harry was but here!'

'I wish he was,' said Norman, from the bottom of his heart; but you see, Tom, if this sets you on always telling truth, I shan't think any great harm done.'

A fresh burst, 'Oh! they are all so glad! They say such things! And the Mays were never in disgrace before. O Norman, Norman!'

'Never mind about that,—' began Norman.

'But you would mind,' broke in the boy, passionately, 'if you knew what Anderson junior, and Axworthy say! They say it serves you right, and they were going to send me to old Ballhatchet's to get some of his stuff to drink confusion to the mouth of June, and all pragmatistical meddlers; and when I said I could not go, they vowed if I did not, I should eat the corks for them! And Anderson junior called me names, and licked me. Look there.' He showed a dark blue-and-red stripe, raised on the palm of his hand. 'I could not write well for it these three days, and Hawes gave me double copies!'

'The cowardly fellows!' exclaimed Norman, indignantly. 'But you did not go?'

‘No, Anderson senior stopped them. He said he would not have the Ballhatchet business begin again.’

‘That is one comfort,’ said Norman. ‘I see he does not dare not to keep order. But if you’ll only stay with me, August, I’ll take care they don’t hurt you.’

‘Oh! June! June!’ and he threw himself across his kind brother. ‘I am so very sorry! Oh! to see you put down—and hear them! And you to lose the scholarship! Oh, dear! oh, dear! and be in disgrace with them all!’

‘But, Tom, do cheer up. It is nothing to be in such distress at. Papa knows all about it, and while he does, I don’t care half so much.’

‘O, I wish—I wish—’

‘You see, Tom,’ said Norman, ‘after all, though it is very kind of you to be sorry for not being able to get me out of this scrape, the thing one wants you to be sorry about, is your own affair.’

‘I wish I had never come to school! I wish Anderson would leave me alone! It is all his fault! A mean-spirited, skulking, bullying—’

‘Hush, hush, Tom, he is bad enough, but now you know what he is, you can keep clear of him for the future. Now listen. You and I will make a fresh start, and try if we can’t get the Mays to be looked on as they were when Harry was here. Let us mind the rules, and get into no more mischief.’

‘You’ll keep me from Ned Anderson and Axworthy?’ whispered Tom.

‘Yes, that I will. And you’ll try and speak the truth, and be straightforward?’

‘I will, I will,’ said Tom, worn out in spirits by his long bondage, and glad to catch at the hope of relief and protection.

‘Then let us come home,’ and Tom put his hand into his brother’s, as a few weeks back would have seemed most unworthy of school-boy dignity.

Thenceforth Tom was devoted to Norman, and kept close to him, sure that the instant he was from under his wing, his former companions would fall on him to revenge his defection, but clinging to him also from real affection and gratitude. Indolence and timidity were the true root of what had for a time seemed like a positively bad disposition; beneath, there was a warm heart, and sense of right, which had been almost stifled for the time, in the desire, from moment to moment, to avoid present trouble or fear. Under Norman’s care his better self had freer scope, he was guarded from immediate terror, and kept from the suggestions of the worst sort of boys, as much as was in his brother’s power; and the looks they cast towards him, and the sly torments they attempted to inflict, by no means invited him back to them. The lessons, where he had a long inveterate habit of shuffling, came under Norman’s eye at

the same time. He always prepared them in his presence, instead of in the most secret manner possible, and with all Anderson's expeditious modes of avoiding the making them of any use. Norman sat by, and gave such help as was fair and just, showed him how to learn, and explained difficulties, and the ingenuity hitherto spent in eluding learning being now directed to gaining it, he began to make real progress, and find satisfaction in it. The comfort of being good dawned upon him once more, but still there was much to contend with; he had acquired such a habit of prevarication, that, if by any means taken by surprise, his impulse was to avoid giving a straightforward answer, and when he recollected his sincerity, the truth came with the air of falsehood. Moreover, he was an arrant coward, and provoked tricks by his manifest and unreasonable terrors. It was no slight exercise of patience that Norman underwent, but this was the interest he had made for himself; and the recovery of the boy's attachment, and his improvement, though slow, were a present recompense.

Ernescliffe, Larkins, and others of the boys, held fast to him, and after the first excitement was past, all the rest returned to their former tone. He was decidedly as much respected as ever, and, at the same time, regarded with more favour than when his strictness was resented. And as for the discipline of the school, that did not suffer. Anderson felt that, for his own credit, he must not allow the rules to be less observed than in May's reign, and he enforced them upon the reluctant and angry boys, with whom he had been previously making common cause. Dr. Hoxton boasted to the under-masters that the school had never been in such good order as under Anderson, little guessing that this was but reaping the fruits of a past victory, or that every boy in the whole school gave the highest place in their esteem to the deposed Dux.

To Anderson, Norman's cordial manner and ready support, were the strangest part of all, only explained by thinking that he deemed it, as he tried to do himself, merely the fortune of war, and was sensible of no injury.

And, for Norman himself, when the first shock was over, and he was accustomed to the change, he found the cessation of vigilance a relief, and carried a lighter heart than any time since his mother's death. His sisters could not help observing that there was less sadness in the expression of his eyes, that he carried his head higher, walked with freedom and elasticity of step, tossed and flourished the Daisy till she shouted and crowed, while Margaret shrank at such freaks; and, though he was not much of a laugher himself, contributed much sport in the way of bright apposite sayings to the home circle.

It was a very unexpected mode of cure for depression of spirits, but there could be no question that it succeeded; and when, a few Saturdays after, he drove Dr. May again to Groveswood to see young

Mr. Lake, who was recovering, he brought Margaret home a whole pile of botanical curiosities, and drew his father into an animated battle over natural and Linnæan systems which kept the whole party merry with the pros and cons every evening for a week.

CHAPTER XXIII.

‘Oh! the golden-hearted daisies,
Witnessed there before my youth,
To the truth of things, with praises
Of the beauty of the truth.’

E. B. BROWNING.

‘MARGARET, see here.’

The Doctor threw into her lap a letter, which made her cheeks light up.

Mr. Ernescliffe wrote that his father’s friend, Captain Gordon, having been appointed to the frigate *Alcestis*, had chosen him as one of his lieutenants, and offered a nomination as naval cadet for his brother. He had replied that the navy was not Hector’s destination, but, as Captain Gordon had no one else in view, had prevailed on him to pass on the proposal to Harry May.

Alan wrote in high terms of his captain, declaring that he esteemed the having sailed with him as one of the greatest advantages he had ever received, and adding, that, for his own part, Dr. May needed no promise from him, to be assured that he would watch over Harry like his own brother. It was believed that the *Alcestis* was destined for the South American station.

‘A three years’ business,’ said Dr. May, with a sigh. ‘But the thing is done, and this is as good as we can hope.’

‘Far better!’ said Margaret. ‘What pleasure it must have given him! Dear Harry could not sail under more favourable circumstances.’

‘No, I would trust to Ernescliffe as I would to Richard. It is kindly done, and I will thank him at once. Where does he date from?’

‘From Portsmouth. He does not say whether he has seen Harry.’

‘I suppose he waited for my answer. Suppose I inclose a note for him to give to Harry. There will be rapture enough, and it is a pity he should not have the benefit of it.’

The Doctor sat down to write, while Margaret worked and mused, perhaps on outfits and new shirts—perhaps on Harry’s lion-locks, beneath a blue cap and gold band, or, perchance, on the coral shoals of the Pacific.

It was one of the quiet afternoons, when all the rest were out, and which the Doctor and his daughter especially valued, when they

were able to spend one together without interruption. Soon, however, a ring at the door brought an impatient exclamation from the Doctor; but his smile beamed out at the words, 'Miss Rivers.' They were great friends; in fact, on terms of some mutual sauciness, though Meta was, as yet, far less at home with his daughters, and came in, looking somewhat shy.

'Ah, your congeners are gone out!' was the Doctor's reception 'You must put up with our sober selves.'

'Is Flora gone far?' asked Meta.

'To Cocksmoor,' said Margaret. 'I am very sorry she has missed you.'

'Shall I be in your way?' said Meta, timidly. 'Papa has several things to do, and said he would call for me here.'

'Good luck for Margaret,' said Dr. May.

'So they are gone to Cocksmoor!' said Meta. 'How I envy them!'

'You would not, if you saw the place,' said Dr. May. 'I believe Norman is very angry with me for letting them go near it.'

'Ah! but they are of real use there!'

'And Miss Meta is obliged to take to envying the black-hole of Cocksmoor, instead of being content with the eglantine bowers of Abbotstoke! I commiserate her!' said the Doctor.

'If I did any good instead of harm at Abbotstoke!'

'Harm!' exclaimed Margaret.

'They went on very well without me,' said Meta; 'but ever since I have had the class, they have been getting naughtier and noisier every Sunday; and, last Sunday, the prettiest of all—the one I liked best, and had done everything for—she began to mimic me—held up her finger, as I did, and made them all laugh!'

'Well, that is very bad!' said Margaret; 'but I suppose she was a very little one.'

'No, a quick, clever one, who knew much better, about nine years old. She used to be always at home in the week, dragging about a great baby; and we managed that her mother should afford to stay at home, and send her to school. It seemed such a pity her cleverness should be wasted.'

The Doctor smiled. 'Ah! depend upon it, the tyrant-baby was the best disciplinarian.'

Meta looked extremely puzzled.

'Papa means,' said Margaret, 'that if she was inclined to be conceited, the being teased at home might do her more good than being brought forward at school.'

'I have done everything wrong, it seems,' said Meta, with a shade of what the French call *dépit*. 'I thought it must be right and good—but it has only done mischief; and now papa says they are an ungrateful set, and that, if it vexes me, I had better have no more to do with them!'

‘It does not vex you so much as that, I hope,’ said Margaret.

‘O, I could not bear that!’ said Meta; ‘but it is so different from what I thought!’

‘Ah! you had an Arcadia of good little girls in straw hats, such as I see in Blanche’s little books,’ said the Doctor, ‘all making the young lady an oracle, and doing wrong—if they do it at all—in the simplest way, just for an example to the others.’

‘Dr. May! How can you know so well? But do you really think it is their fault, or mine?’

‘Do you think me a conjurer?’

‘Well, but what do you think?’

‘What do Mr. and Mrs. Charles Wilmot think?’

‘I know Mrs. Wilmot thinks I spoil my class. She spoke to me about making favourites, and sometimes has seemed surprised at things which I have done. Last Sunday she told me she thought I had better have a steadier class, and I know whom she will give me—the great big, stupid ones, at the bottom of the first class! I do believe it is only out of good-nature that she does not tell me not to teach at all. I have a great mind I will not; I know I do nothing but harm.’

‘What shall you say if I tell you I think so too?’ asked the Doctor.

‘O, Dr. May! you don’t really? Now, does he, Miss May? I am sure I only want to do them good. I don’t know what I can have done.’

Margaret made her perceive that the Doctor was smiling, and she changed her tone, and earnestly begged to be told what they thought of the case; for if she should show her concern at home, her father and governess would immediately beg her to cease from all connection with the school, and she did not feel at all convinced that Mrs. Wilmot liked to have her there. Feeling injured by the implied accusation of mismanagement, yet, with a sense of its truth, used to be petted, and new to rebuffs, yet with a sincere wish to act rightly, she was much perplexed by this, her first reverse, and had come partly with the view of consulting Flora, though she had fallen on other counsellors.

‘Margaret, our adviser general,’ said the Doctor, ‘what do you say? Put yourself in the place of Mrs. Charles Wilmot, and say, shall Miss Rivers teach, or not?’

‘I had rather you would, papa.’

‘Not I—I never kept school.’

‘Well, then, I being Mrs. Wilmot, should certainly be mortified if Miss Rivers deserted me, because the children were naughty. I think, I think I had rather she came and asked me what she had better do.’

‘And you would answer “teach,” for fear of vexing her,’ said Meta

'I should, and also for the sake of letting her learn to teach.'

'The point where only trial shows one's ignorance,' said Dr. May.

'But I don't want to do it for my own sake,' said Meta. 'I do everything for my own sake already.'

'For theirs, then,' said the Doctor. 'If teaching will not come by nature, you must serve an apprenticeship, if you mean to be of service in that line. Perhaps, it was the gift that the fairies omitted.'

'But will it do any good to them?'

'I can't tell; but I am sure it would do them harm for you to give it up, because it is disagreeable.'

'Well,' said Meta, with a sigh, 'I'll go and talk to Mrs. Wilmot. I could not bear to give up anything that seems right, just now, because of the Confirmation.'

Margaret eagerly inquired, and it appeared that the Bishop had given notice for a confirmation in August, and that Mr. Wilmot was already beginning to prepare his candidates, whilst Mr. Ramsden, always tardy, never gave notice till the last moment possible. The hope was expressed that Harry might be able to profit by this opportunity; and Harry's prospects were explained to Meta; then the Doctor, recollecting something that he wished to say to Mr. Rivers, began to ask about the chance of his coming before the time of an engagement of his own.

'He said he should be here at about half-past four,' said Meta. 'He is gone to the station to inquire about the trains. Do you know what time the last comes in?'

'At nine forty-five,' said the Doctor.

'That is what we were afraid of. It is for Bellairs, my maid. Her mother is very ill, and she is afraid she is not properly nursed. It is about five miles from the Milbury Station, and we thought of letting her go with a day-ticket, to see about her. She could go in the morning, after I am up; but I don't know what is to be done, for she could not get back before I dress for dinner.'

Margaret felt perfectly aghast at the cool tone, especially after what had passed.

'It would be quite impossible,' said the Doctor. 'Even going by the eight o'clock train, and returning by the last, she would only have two hours to spare—short enough measure for a sick mother.'

'Papa means to give her whatever she wants for any nurse she may get.'

'Is there no one with her mother now?'

'A son's wife, who, they think, is not kind. Poor Bellairs was so grateful for being allowed to go home. I wonder if I could dress for once without her.'

'Do you know old Crabbe?'

'The dear old man at Abbotstoke? O yes, of course.'

‘There was a very sad case in his family. The mother was dying of a lingering illness, when the son met with a bad accident. The only daughter was a lady’s maid, and could not be spared, though the brother was half crazy to see her, and there was no one to tend them but a wretch of a woman, paid by the parish. The poor fellow kept calling for his sister in his delirium, and, at last, I could not help writing to the mistress.’

‘Did she let her come?’ said Meta, her cheek glowing.

‘As a great favour, she let her set out by the mail train, after dressing her for a ball, with orders to return in time for her toilette for an evening party the next day.’

‘O, I remember,’ said Margaret, ‘her coming here at five in the morning, and your taking her home.’

‘And when we got to Abbotstoke, the brother was dead. That parish nurse had not attended to my directions, and, I do believe, was the cause of it. The mother had had a seizure, and was in the most precarious state.’

‘Surely she stayed!’

‘It was as much as her place was worth,’ said the Doctor; ‘and her wages were the chief maintenance of the family. So she had to go back to dress her mistress, while the old woman lay there, wailing after Betsy. She did give warning then, but, before the month was out, the mother was dead.’

Meta did not speak, and Dr. May presently rose, saying, he should try to meet Mr. Rivers in the town, and went out. Meta sat thoughtful, and, at last, sighing, said, ‘I wonder whether Bellairs’ mother is so very ill? I have a great mind to let Susan try to do my hair, and let Bellairs stay a little longer. I never thought of that.’

‘I do not think you will be sorry,’ said Margaret.

‘Yes, I shall, for if my hair does not look nice, papa will not be pleased, and there is aunt Leonora coming. How odd it will be to be without Bellairs! I will ask Mrs. Larpent.’

‘Oh, yes!’ said Margaret. ‘You must not think we meant to advise; but papa has seen so many instances of distress, from servants not spared to their friends in illness, that he feels strongly on the subject.’

‘And I really might have been as cruel as that woman!’ said Meta. ‘Well, I hope Mrs. Bellairs may be better, and able to spare her daughter. I don’t know what will become of me without her.’

‘I think it will have been a satisfaction in one way,’ said Margaret.

‘In what way?’

‘Don’t you remember what you began by complaining of, that you could not be of use? Now I fancy this would give you the pleasure of undergoing a little personal inconvenience for the good of another.’

Meta looked half puzzled, half thoughtful, and Margaret, who was a little uneasy at the style of counsel she found herself giving, changed the conversation.

It was a memorable one to little Miss Rivers, opening out to her as did almost all her meetings with that family, a new scope for thought and for duty. The code, to which she had been brought up, taught that servants were the machines of their employer's convenience. Good-nature occasioned much kindness of manner and intercourse, and every luxury and indulgence was afforded freely; but where there was any want of accordance between the convenience of the two parties, there was no question. The master must be the first object, the servants' remedy was in their own hands.

Amiable as was Mr. Rivers, this, merely from indulgence and want of reflection, was his principle; and his daughter had only been acting on it, though she did not know it, till the feelings, that she had never thought of, were thus displayed before her. These were her first practical lessons that life was not meant to be passed in pleasing ourselves, and being good-natured at small cost.

It was an effort. Meta was very dependant, never having been encouraged to be otherwise, and Bellairs was like a necessary of life in her estimation; but strength of principle came to aid her naturally kind-hearted feeling, and she was pleased by the idea of voluntarily undergoing a privation, so as to test her sincerity.

So when her father told her of the inconvenient times of the trains, and declared that Bellairs must give it up, she answered, by proposing to let her sleep a night or two there, gaily promised to manage very well, and satisfied him.

Her maid's grateful looks and thanks recompensed her when she made the offer to her, and inspirited her to an energetic coaxing of Mrs. Larpent, who, being more fully aware than her father, of the needfulness of the lady's maid, and also very anxious that her darling should appear to the best advantage before the expected aunt, Lady Leonora Langdale, was unwilling to grant more than one night at the utmost.

Meta carried the day, and her last assurance to Bellairs was, that she might stay as long as seemed necessary to make her mother comfortable.

Thereupon Meta found herself more helpful in some matters than she had expected, but at a loss in others. Susan, with all Mrs. Larpent's supervision, could not quite bring her dress to the air that was so peculiarly graceful and becoming; and she often caught her papa's eye, looking at her as if he saw something amiss, and could not discover what it was. Then came aunt Leonora, always very kind to Meta, but the dread of the rest of the household, whom she was wont to lecture on the proper care of her niece. Miss Rivers was likely to have a considerable fortune, and Lady Leonora intended

her to be a very fashionable and much admired young lady, under her own immediate protection.

The two cousins, Leonora and Agatha, talked to her; the one of her balls, the other of her music—patronized her, and called her their good little cousin—while they criticised the stiff set of those unfortunate plaits made by Susan, and laughed, as if it was an unheard-of concession, at Bellairs' holiday.

Nevertheless, when 'Honoured Miss' received a note, begging for three days' longer grace, till a niece should come, in whom Bellairs could place full confidence, she took it on herself to return free consent. Lady Leonora found out what she had done, and reproved her, telling her it was only the way to make 'those people' presume, and Mrs. Larpent was also taken to task; but, decidedly, Meta did not regret what she had done, though she felt as if she had never before known how to appreciate comfort, when she once more beheld Bellairs stationed at her toilette table.

Meta was asked about her friends. She could not mention any one but Mrs. Charles Wilmot and the Miss Mays.

'Physician's daughters; oh!' said Lady Leonora.

And she proceeded to exhort Mr. Rivers to bring his daughter to London, or its neighbourhood, where she might have masters, and be in the way of forming intimacies suited to her connections.

Mr. Rivers dreaded London—never was well there, and did not like the trouble of moving—while Meta was so attached to the Grange, that she entreated him not to think of leaving it, and greatly dreaded her aunt's influence. Lady Leonora did, indeed, allow that the Grange was a very pretty place; her only complaint was, the want of suitable society for Meta; she could not bear the idea of her growing accustomed—for want of something better—to the Vicar's wife, and the pet Doctor's daughters.

Flora had been long desirous to effect a regular call at Abbotstoke, and it was just now that she succeeded. Mrs. Charles Wilmot's little girl was to have a birth-day feast, at which Mary, Blanche, and Aubrey were to appear. Flora went in charge of them, and as soon as she had safely deposited them, and appointed Mary to keep Aubrey out of mischief, she walked up to the Grange, not a whit daunted by the report of the very fine ladies, who were astonishing the natives of Abbotstoke.

She was admitted, and found herself in the drawing-room, with a quick lively-looking lady, whom she perceived to be Lady Leonora, and who instantly began talking to her very civilly. Flora was never at a loss, and they got on extremely well; her ease and self-possession, without forwardness, telling much to her advantage. Meta came in, delighted to see her, but, of course, the visit resulted in no really intimate talk, though it was not without effect. Flora declared Lady Leonora Langdale to be a most charming person; and Lady Leonora, on her side, asked Meta who was that very

elegant conversible girl. 'Flora May,' was the delighted answer, now that the aunt had committed herself by commendation. And she did not retract it; she pronounced Flora to be something quite out of the common way, and supposed that she had had unusual advantages.

Mr. Rivers took care to introduce to his sister-in-law, Dr. May, (who would fain have avoided it,) but ended by being in his turn pleased and entertained by her brilliant conversation, which she put forth for him, as her instinct showed her that she was talking to a man of high ability. A perfect gentleman she saw him to be, and making out some mutual connections far up in the family tree of the Mackenzies, she decided that the May family were an acquisition, and very good companions for her niece at present, while not yet come out.

So ended the visit, with this great triumph for Meta, who had a strong belief in Aunt Leonora's power and infallibility, and yet had not consulted her about Bellairs, nor about the school question.

She had missed one Sunday's school on account of her aunt's visit, but the resolution made beside Margaret's sofa had not been forgotten. She spent her Saturday afternoon in a call on Mrs. Wilmot, ending with a walk through the village; she confessed her ignorance, apologized for her blunders, and put herself under the direction which once she had fancied too strict and harsh to be followed.

And on Sunday, she was content to teach the stupid girls, and abstain from making much of the smooth-faced engaging set. She thought it very dull work, but she could feel that it was something not done to please herself; and whereas her father had feared she would be dull when her cousins were gone, he found her more joyous than ever.

There certainly was a peculiar happiness about Margaret Rivers; her vexations were but ripples, rendering the sunny course of her life more sparkling, and each exertion in the way of goodness was productive of so much present joy, that the steps of her ladder seemed, indeed, to be of diamonds.

Her ladder—for she was, indeed, mounting upwards. She was very earnest in her Confirmation preparation, most anxious to do right and to contend with her failings; but the struggle at present was easy; and the hopes, joys, and incentives, shone out more and more upon her in this blithe stage of her life.

She knew there was a dark side, but hope and love were more present to her than was fear. Happy those to whom such young days are granted

CHAPTER XXIV.

'It is the generous spirit, who, when brought
Among the tasks of real life, hath wrought
Upon the plan that pleased his childish thought,
Whose high endeavors are an inward light,
Making the path before him always bright.'

WORDSWORTH.

THE holidays had commenced about a week when Harry, now duly appointed to H. M. S. *Aleestis*, was to come home on leave, as he proudly expressed it.

A glad troop of brothers and sisters, with the Doctor himself, walked up to the station to meet him, and who was happiest when, from the window was thrust out the rosy face, with the gold band? Mary gave such a shriek and leap, that two passengers and one guard turned round to look at her, to the extreme discomfiture of Flora and Norman, evidenced by one by a grave 'Mary! Mary!' by the other, by walking off to the extreme end of the platform, and trying to look as if he did not belong to them, in which he was imitated by his shadow, Tom.

Sailor already, rather than school-boy, Harry cared not for spectators; his bound from the carriage and the hug between him and Mary would have been worthy of the return from the voyage. The next greeting was for his father, and the sisters had had their share by the time the two brothers thought fit to return from their calm walk on the platform.

Grand was it to see that party return to the town—the naval cadet, with his arm linked in Mary's, and Aubrey clinging to his hand, and the others walking behind, admiring him as he turned his bright face every moment with some glad question or answer, 'How was Margaret?' Oh, so much better; she had been able to walk across the room, with Norman's arm round her—they hoped she would soon use crutches—and she sat up more. 'And the baby?' More charming than ever—four teeth—would soon walk—such a darling! Then came 'my dirk, the ship, our berth.' 'Papa, do ask Mr. Ernescliffe to come here. I know he could get leave.'

'Mr. Ernescliffe! You used to call him Alan!' said Mary.

'Yes, but that is all over now. You forget what we do on board. Captain Gordon himself calls me Mr. May!'

Some laughed, others were extremely impressed.

'Ha! There's Ned Anderson coming,' cried Mary. 'Now! Let him see you, Harry.'

'What matters Ned Anderson to me?' said Harry; and, with an odd mixture of shame-facedness and cordiality, he marched full up to his old school-fellow, and shook hands with him, as if able, in the plenitude of his officership, to afford plenty of good-humored

superiority. Tom had meantime subsided out of all view. But poor Harry's exultation had a fall.

'Well!' graciously inquired 'Mr. May,' and how is Harvey?'

'O very well. We are expecting him home to-morrow.'

'Where has he been?'

'To Oxford, about the Randall.'

Harry gave a disturbed, wondering look round, on seeing Edward's air of malignant satisfaction. He saw nothing that reassured him, except the quietness of Norman's own face, but even that altered as their eyes met. Before another word could be said, however, the Doctor's hand was on Harry's shoulder.

'You must not keep him now, Ned,' said he—'his sister has not seen him yet.'

And he moved his little procession onwards, still resting on Harry's shoulder, while a silence had fallen on all, and even the young sailor ventured no question. Only Tom's lips were quivering, and Ethel had squeezed Norman's hand. 'Poor Harry!' he muttered, 'this is worst of all! I wish we had written it to him.'

'So do I now, but we always trusted it would come right. Oh! if I were but a boy to flog that Edward!'

'Hush, Ethel, remember what we resolved.'

They were entering their own garden, where, beneath the shade of the tulip-tree, Margaret lay on her couch. Her arms were held out, and Harry threw himself upon her, but when he rose from her caress, Norman and Tom were gone.

'What is this?' he now first ventured to ask.

'Come with me,' said Dr. May, leading the way to his study, where he related the whole history of the suspicion that Norman had incurred. He was glad that he had done so in private, for Harry's indignation and grief went beyond his expectations; and when at last it appeared that Harvey Anderson was actually Randall scholar, after opening his eyes with the utmost incredulity, and causing it to be a second time repeated, he gave a gulp or two, turned very red, and ended by laying his head on the table, and fairly sobbing and crying aloud, in spite of dirk, uniform, and manhood.

'Harry! why Harry, my boy! We should have prepared you for this,' said the Doctor, affectionately. 'We have left off breaking our hearts about it. I don't want any comfort now, for having gold instead of glitter; though at first I was as bad as you.'

'O if I had but been there!' said Harry, combating unsuccessfully with his tears.

'Ah! so we all said, Norman and all. Your word would have cleared him—that is, if you had not been in the thick of the mischief. Ha! July, should not you have been on the top of the wall?'

'I would have stood by him, at least. Would not I have given Axworthy and Anderson two such black eyes as they could not

have shown in school for a week? They had better look out' cried Harry, savagely.

'What! An officer in Her Majesty's service! Eh, Mr. May?

'Don't, papa, don't. Oh! I thought it would have been so happy, when I came home, to see Norman Randall-scholar. Oh! now I don't care for the ship, nor anything.'

Again Harry's face went down on the table.

'Come, come, Harry,' said Dr. May, pulling off the spectacles that had become very dewy, 'don't let us make fools of ourselves, or they will think we are crying for the scholarship.'

'I don't care for the scholarship, but to have June turned down—and disgrace—'

'What I care for, Harry, is having June what he is, and *that* I know better now.'

'He is! he is—he is June himself, and no mistake!' cried Harry, with vehemence.

'The prime of the year, is not it?' said the Doctor, smiling, as he stroked down the blue sleeve, as if he thought that generous July did not fall far short of it.

'That he is!' exclaimed Harry. 'I have never met one fellow like him.'

'It will be a chance if you ever do,' said Dr. May. 'That is better than scholarships!'

'It should have been both,' said Harry.

'Norman thinks the disappointment has been very good for him,' said the Doctor. 'Perhaps it made him what he is now. All success is no discipline, you know.'

Harry looked as if he did not know.

'Perhaps you will understand better by-and-by, but this I can tell you, Harry, that the patient bearing of his vexation, has done more to renew Norman's spirits, than all his prosperity. See if it has not. I believe it is harder to everyone of us, than to him. To Ethel, especially, it is a struggle to be in charity with the Andersons.'

'In charity!' repeated Harry. 'Papa! you don't want us to like a horrid, sneaking, mean-spirited pair like those, that have used Norman in that shameful way?'

'No, certainly not; I only want you to feel no more personal anger, than if it had been Cheviot, or some indifferent person, that had been injured.'

'I should have hated them all the same!' cried Harry.

'If it is *all the same*, and it is the treachery you hate, I ask no more,' said the Doctor.

'I can't help it, papa, I can't! If I were to meet those fellows, do you think I could shake hands with them? If I did not lick Ned all down Minster-street, he might think himself lucky.'

'Well, Harry, I won't argue any more. I have no right to

preach forbearance. Your brother's example is better worth than my precept. Shall we go back to Margaret, or have you anything to say to me ?'

Harry made no positive answer, but pressed close to his father, who put his arm round him, while the curly-head was laid on his shoulder. Presently, he said, with a great sigh, 'There's nothing like home.'

'Was that what you wanted to say ?' asked Dr. May, smiling, as he held the boy more closely to him.

'No ; but it will be a long time before I come back. They think we shall have orders for the Pacific.'

'You will come home our real lion,' said the Doctor. 'How much you will have to tell !'

'Yes,' said Harry ; 'but, oh ! it is very different from coming home every night, not having anyone to tell a thing to.'

'Do you want to say anything now ?'

'I don't know. I told you in my letter about the half-sovereign.'

'Aye, never mind that.'

'And there was one night, I am afraid, I did not stand by a little fellow that they bullied about his prayers. Perhaps he would have gone on, if I had helped him !'

'Does he sail with you ?'

'No, he was at school. If I had told him that he and I would stand by each other—but he looked so foolish, and began to cry ! I am sorry now.'

'Weak spirits have much to bear,' said the Doctor, 'and you stronger ones, who don't mind being bullied, are meant, I suppose, to help them, as Norman has been doing by poor little Tommy.'

'It was thinking of Norman—that made me sorry. I knew there was something else, but you see I forget, when I don't see you and Margaret every day.'

'You have One always near, my boy.'

'I know, but I cannot always recollect. And there is such a row at night on board, I cannot think or attend as I ought,' murmured Harry.

'Yes, your life, sleeping at home in quiet, has not prepared you for that trial,' said the Doctor. 'But others have kept upright habits under the same, you know—and God helps those who are doing their best.'

Harry sighed.

'I mean to do my best,' he added ; 'and if it was not for feeling bad, I should like it. I *do* like it'—and his eye sparkled, and his smile beamed, though the tear was undried.

'I know you do !' said Dr. May, smiling, 'and for feeling bad, my Harry, I fear you must do that by sea, or land, as long as you are in this world. God be thanked that you grieve over the feeling

But He is ready to aid, and knows the trial, and you will be brought nearer to Him, before you leave us.'

'Margaret wrote about the Confirmation. Am I old enough?'

'If you wish it, Harry, under these circumstances.'

'I suppose I do,' said Harry, uneasily twirling a button. 'But then, if I've got to forgive the Andersons—'

'We won't talk any more of that,' said the Doctor—'here is poor Mary, reconnoitring, to know why I am keeping you from her.'

Then began the scampering up and down the house, round and round the garden, visiting every pet or haunt, or contrivance; Mary and Harry at the head, Blanche and Tom in full career after them, and Aubrey stumping and scrambling at his utmost speed, far behind.

Not a word passed between Norman and Harry on the school misadventure, but, after the outbreak of the latter, he treated it as a thing forgotten, and brought all his high spirits to enliven the family party. Richard, too, returned later on the same day, and though not received with the same uproarious joy as Harry, the elder section of the family were as happy in their way as what Blanche called the middle-aged. The Daisy was brought down, and the eleven were again all in the same room, though there were suppressed sighs from some, who reflected how long it might be before they could again assemble.

Tea went off happily in the garden, with much laughing and talking. 'Pity to leave such good company!' said the Doctor, unwillingly rising at last—'but I must go to the Union—I promised Ward to meet him there.'

'O let me walk with you!' cried Harry.

'And me!' cried other voices, and the Doctor proposed that they should wait for him in the meads, and extend the walk after the visit. Richard and Ethel both expressing their intention of adhering to Margaret—the latter observing how nice it would be to get rid of everybody, and have a talk.

'What have we been doing all this time!' said Dr. May, laughing.

'Chattering, not conversing,' said Ethel, saucily.

'Aye! the Cocks Moor board is going to sit,' said Dr. May.

'What is a board?' inquired Blanche, who had just come down prepared for her walk.

'Richard, Margaret, and Ethel, when they sit upon Cocks Moor,' said Dr. May.

'But Margaret never does sit on Cocks Moor, papa.'

'Only allegorically, Blanche,' said Norman.

'But I don't understand what is a board?' pursued Blanche.

'Mr. May in his ship,' was Norman's suggestion.

Poor Blanche stood in perplexity. 'What is it really?'

'Something wooden-headed,' continued the provoking papa.

'A board is all wooden, not only its head,' said Blanche.

'Exactly so, especially at Stoneborough!' said the Doctor.

'It is what papa is when he comes out of the council-room,' added Ethel.

'Or what everyone is while the girls are rigging themselves,' sighed Harry. 'Ha! here's Polly—now we only want Flora.'

'And my stethoscope! Has anyone seen my stethoscope?' exclaimed the Doctor, beginning to rush frantically into the study, dining-room, and his own room; but failing, quietly took up a book, and gave up the search, which was vigorously pursued by Richard, Flora, and Mary, until the missing article was detected, where Aubrey had left it in the nook on the stairs, after using it for a trumpet and a telescope.

'Ah! now my goods will have a chance!' said Dr. May, as he took it, and patted Richard's shoulder. 'I have my best right-hand, and Margaret will be saved endless sufferings.'

'Papa!'

'Aye! poor dear! don't I see what she undergoes, when nobody will remember that useful proverb, "A place for everything, and everything in its place." I believe one use of her brains is to make an inventory of all the things left about the drawing-room; but, beyond it, it is past her power.'

'Yes,' said Flora, rather aggrieved; 'I do the best I can, but when nobody ever puts anything into its place, what can I do, single-handed? So no one ever goes anywhere without first turning the house up-side down, for their property; and Aubrey, and now even baby, are always carrying whatever they can lay hands on into the nursery. I can't bear it; and the worst of it is, that—' she added, finishing her lamentation, after the others were out at the door, 'Papa and Ethel have neither of them the least shame about it.'

'No, no, Flora, that is not fair!' exclaimed Margaret—but Flora was gone.

'I have shame,' sighed Ethel, walking across the room, disconsolately, to put a book into a shelf.

'And you don't leave things *trainants* as you used,' said Margaret. 'That is what I meant.'

'I wish I did not,' said Ethel; 'I was thinking whether I had better not make myself pay a forfeit. Suppose you keep a book for me, Margaret, and make a mark against me at everything I leave about, and if I pay a farthing for each, it will be so much away from Cocks Moor, so I must cure myself!'

'And what shall become of the forfeits?' asked Richard.

'Oh, they won't be enough to be worth having, I hope,' said Margaret.

'Give them to the Ladies' Committee,' said Ethel, making a

face. 'Oh, Ritchie! they are worse than ever. We are so glad that Flora is going to join it, and see whether she can do any good.'

'We?' said Margaret, hesitating.

'Ah! I know you aren't, but papa said she might—and you know she has so much tact and management—'

'As Norman says,' observed Margaret, doubtfully. 'I cannot like the notion of Flora going and squabbling with Mrs. Ledwich and Louisa Anderson!'

'What do you think, Ritchie?' asked Ethel. 'Is it not too bad that they should have it all their own way, and spoil the whole female population? Why, the last thing they did was to leave off reading the Prayer-book prayers morning and evening! And it is much expected that next they will attack all learning by heart.'

'It is too bad,' said Richard, 'but Flora can hardly hinder them.'

'It will be one voice,' said Ethel; 'but oh! if I could only say half what I have in my mind, they must see the error. 'Why, these, these—what they call formal—these the ties—links on to the Church—on to what is good—if they don't learn them soundly—rammed down hard—you know what I mean—so that they can't remember the first—remember when they did not know them—they will never get to learn—know—understand when they can understand!'

'My dear Ethel, don't frown so horribly, or it will spoil your eloquence,' said Margaret.

'I don't understand either,' said Richard, gravely. 'Not understand when they can understand? What do you mean?'

'Why, Ritchie, don't you see? If they don't learn them—hard, firm, by rote when they can't—they won't understand when they can.'

'If they don't learn when they can't, they won't understand when they can?'—puzzled Richard—making Margaret laugh—but Ethel was too much in earnest for amusement.

'If they don't learn them by rote when they have strong memories. Yes, that's it!' she continued, 'they will not know them well enough to understand them when they are old enough!'

'Who won't learn or understand what?' said Richard.

'Oh! Ritchie, Ritchie! Why the children—the Psalms—the Gospels—the things. They ought to know them, love them, grow up to them, before they know the meaning, or they won't care. Memory, association, affection, all those come when one is younger than comprehension!'

'Younger than one's own comprehension?'

'Richard, you are grown more tiresome than ever. Are you laughing at me?'

'Indeed, I beg your pardon—I did not mean it,' said Richard. I am very sorry to be so stupid.'

'My dear Ritchie, it was only my blundering—never mind.'

'But what did you mean? I want to know, indeed, Ethel.'

'I mean that memory and association come before comprehension, so that one ought to know all good things—fa—with familiarity before one can understand, because understanding does not make one love. Oh! one does that before, and, when the first little gleam, little bit of a sparklet of the meaning does come, then it is so valuable and so delightful.'

'I never heard of a little bit of a sparklet before,' said Richard, 'but I think I do see what Ethel means; and it is like what I heard and liked in a University sermon some Sundays ago, saying that these lessons and holy words were to be impressed on us here from infancy on earth, that we might be always unravelling their meaning, and learn it fully at last—where we hope to be.'

'The very same thought!' exclaimed Margaret delighted; 'but,' after a pause, 'I am afraid the Ladies' Committee might not enter into it in plain English, far less in Ethel's language.'

'Now, Margaret! You know I never meant myself. I never can get the right words for what I mean.'

'And you leave about your *faux commencements*, as M. Ballompré would call them, for us to stumble over,' said Margaret.

'But Flora would manage!' said Ethel. 'She has power over people, and can influence them. O Ritchie, don't persuade papa out of letting her go.'

'Does Mr. Wilmot wish it?' asked Richard.

'I have not heard him say, but he was very much vexed about the prayers,' said Ethel.

'Will he stay here for the holidays?'

'No, his father has not been well, and he is gone to take his duty. He walked with us to Cocksmoor before he went, and we did so wish for you.'

'How have you been getting on?'

'Pretty well, on the whole,' said Ethel, 'but, oh dear! oh dear, Richard, the M'Carthys are gone!'

'Gone, where?'

'Oh, to Wales. I knew nothing of it till they were off. Una and Fergus were missing, and Jane Taylor told me they were all gone. Oh, it is so horrid! Una had really come to be so good and so much in earnest. She behaved so well at school and Church, that even Mrs. Ledwich liked her, and she used to read her Testament half the day, and bring her Sunday-school lessons to ask me about! Oh! I was so fond of her, and it really seemed to have done some good with her. And now it is all lost! Oh! I wish I knew what would become of my poor child!'

'The only hope is that it may not be all lost,' said Margaret.

‘With such a woman for a mother!’ said Ethel; ‘and going to some heathenish place again! If I could only have seen her first, and begged her to go to Church and say her prayers. If I only knew where she is gone! but I don’t. I did think Una would have come to wish me good-bye!’

‘I am very sorry to lose her,’ said Richard.

‘Mr. Wilmot says it is bread cast on the waters,’ said Margaret—‘he was very kind in consoling Ethel, who came home quite in despair.’

‘Yes, he said it was one of the trials,’ said Ethel, ‘and that it might be better for Una as well as for me. And I am trying to care for the rest still, but I cannot yet as I did for her. There are none of the eyes that look as if they were eating up one’s words before they come, and that smile of comprehension! Oh! they all are such stupid little dolts, and so indifferent!’

‘Why, Ethel!’

‘Fancy last Friday—Mary and I found only eight there—’

‘Do you remember what a broiling day Friday was?’ interrupted Margaret. ‘Miss Winter and Norman both told me I ought not to let them go, and I began to think so when they came home. Mary was the colour of a peony!’

‘Oh!’ it would not have signified if the children had been good for anything, but all their mothers were out at work, and, of those that did come, hardly one had learnt their lessons—Willy Blake had lost his spelling-card—Anne Harris kicked Susan Pope, and would not say she was sorry. Mary Hale would not know M from N, do all our Mary would; and Jane Taylor, after all the pains I have taken with her, when I asked how the Israelites crossed the Red Sea, seemed never to have heard of them.’

Margaret could have said that Ethel had come in positively crying with vexation, but with no diminution of the spirit of perseverance. ‘I am so glad you are come, Richard!’ she continued. ‘You will put a little new life into them. They all looked so pleased, when we told them Mr. Richard was coming.’

‘I hope we shall get on,’ said Richard.

‘I want you to judge whether the Popes are civilized enough to be dressed for Sunday-school. Oh! and the money. Here is the account-book—’

‘How neatly you have kept it, Ethel.’

‘Ah! it was for you, you know. Receipts—see, ar’n’t you surprised?’

‘Four pounds, eighteen and eightpence? That is a great deal!’

‘The three guineas were Mr. Rivers’s fees, you know; then, Margaret gave us half-a-sovereign, and Mary a shilling, and there was one that we picked up, tumbling about the house, and papa said we might have, and the two-pence were little Blanche’s savings. Oh, Ritchie!’ as a bright coin appeared on the book.

‘That is all I could save this term,’ he said.

‘Oh! it is famous. Now, I do think I may put another whole sovereign away into the purse for the Church. See, here is what we have paid. Shoes—those did bring our money very low, and then I bought a piece of print which cost sixteen shillings, but it will make plenty of frocks. So, you see, the balance is actually two pounds nine! That is something. The nine shillings will go on till we get another fee; for I have two frocks ready made for the Popes, so the two pounds are a real nest-egg towards the Church.’

‘The Church!’ repeated Richard, half smiling.

‘I looked in the paper the other day, and saw that a chapel had been built for nine hundred pounds,’ said Ethel.

‘And you have two!’

‘Two in eight months, Ritchie, and more will come as we get older. I have a scheme in my head, but I won’t tell you now.’

‘Nine hundred! And a Church has to be endowed as well as built, you know, Ethel.’

‘Oh! never mind that now. If we can begin and build, some good person will come and help. I’ll run and fetch it, Ritchie. I drew out a sketch of what I want it to be.’

‘What a girl that is!’ said Richard, as Ethel dashed away.

‘Is not she?’ said Margaret. ‘And she means all so heartily. Do you know she has spent nothing on her own pleasures, not a book, not a thing has she bought this year, except a present for Blanche’s birthday, and some silk to net a purse for Harry.’

‘I cannot help being sometimes persuaded that she will succeed,’ said Richard.

‘Faith, energy, self-denial, perseverance, they go a great way,’ said Margaret. ‘And yet when we look at poor dear Ethel, and her queer ungainly ways, and think of her building a Church!’

Neither Richard nor Margaret could help laughing, but they checked it at once, and the former said, ‘That brave spirit is a reproof to us all.’

‘Yes,’ said Margaret; ‘and so is the resolution to mend her little faults.’

Ethel came back, having, of course, mislaid her sketch, and, much vexed, wished to know if it ought to cause her first forfeit, but Margaret thought these should not begin till the date of the agreement, and the three resumed the Cocksmeer discussion.

It lasted till the return of the walking party, so late, that they had been star-gazing, and came in, in full dispute as to which was Cygnus and which Aquila, while Blanche was talking very grandly of Taurus Poniatouski, and Harry begging to be told which constellations he should still see in the southern hemisphere. Dr. May was the first to rectify the globe for the southern latitudes, and fingers were affectionately laid on Orion’s studded belt, as

though he were a friend who would accompany the sailor-boy. Voices grew loud and eager in enumerating the stars common to both; and so came bed-time, and the globe stood on the table in danger of being forgotten. Ethel diligently lifted it up; and while Norman exclaimed at her tidiness, Margaret told how a new leaf was to be turned, and of her voluntary forfeits.

‘A very good plan,’ cried the Doctor. ‘We can’t do better than follow her example.’

‘What, you, papa? Oh! what fun!’ exclaimed Harry.

‘So you think I shall be ruined, Mr. Monkey. How do you know I shall not be the most orderly of all? A penny for everything left about, confiscated for the benefit of Cocksmeer, eh?’

‘And twopence for pocket-handkerchiefs, if you please,’ said Norman, with a gesture of disgust.

‘Very well. From Blanche, upwards. Margaret shall have a book, and set down marks against us—hold an audit every Saturday night. What say you, Blanche?’

‘O I hope Flora will leave something about!’ cried Blanche, dancing with glee.



CHAPTER XXV.

‘O no, we never mention her,
We never breathe her name.’—SONG.

A GREAT deal of merriment had come home with Harry, who never was grave for ten minutes without a strong reaction, and distracted the house with his noise and his antics, in proportion, as it sometimes seemed, to the spaces of serious thought and reading spent in the study, where Dr. May did his best to supply Mr. Ramsden’s insufficient attention to his Confirmation candidates, by giving an hour every day to Norman, Ethel, and Harry. He could not lecture, but he read with them, and his own earnestness was very impressive.

The two eldest felt deeply, but Harry often kept it in doubt, whether he were not as yet too young and wild for permanent impressions, so rapid were his transitions, and so overpowering his high spirits. Not that these were objected to; but there was a feeling that there might as well be moderation in all things, and that it would have been satisfactory if, under present circumstances, he had been somewhat more subdued and diligent.

‘There are your decimals not done yet, Harry.’

For Harry being somewhat deficient in arithmetic, had been recommended to work in that line during his visit at home—an operation usually deferred, as at present, to the evening.

‘I am going to do my sums now, Flora,’ said Harry, somewhat annoyed.

He really fetched his arithmetic, and his voice was soon heard asking how he was ever to put an end to a sum that *would* turn to nothing but everlasting threes.

'What have you been doing, young ladies?' asked Dr. May. 'Did you call on Miss Walkingham?'

'Flora and Blanche did,' said Ethel; 'I thought you did not want me to go, and I had not time. Besides, a London grand young lady—Oh!' and Ethel shook her head in disgust.

'That is not the way you treat Meta Rivers.'

'Oh! Meta is different. She has never been out!'

'I should have been glad for you to have seen Miss Walkingham,' said her father. 'Pretty manners are improving; besides, old Lady Walkingham begged me to send my daughters.'

'I should not have seen her,' said Ethel, 'for she was not well enough to let us in.'

'Was it not pushing?' said Flora. 'There were the Andersons leaving their card?'

'Those Andersons!' exclaimed the Doctor; 'I am sick of the very sound of the name. As sure as my name is Dick May, I'll include it in Margaret's book of fines.'

Flora looked dignified.

'They are always harping on that little trumpery girl's nonsense,' said Harry—'Aught, aught, eight, that is eight thousandths, eh, Norman! If it was about those two fellows, the boys—'

'You would harp only on what affects you?' said the Doctor.

'No, I don't; men never do. That is one hundred and twenty-fifth.'

'One man does it to an hundred and twenty-five women?' said Dr. May.

'It is rather a female defect, indeed,' said Margaret.

'Defect!' said Flora.

'Yes,' said Dr. May, 'since it is not only irksome to the hearers, but leads to the breaking of the ninth commandment.'

Many voices declared, in forms of varying severity, that it was impossible to speak worse of the Andersons than they deserved.

'Andersons again!' cried Dr. May, 'One, two, three, four, five, six forfeits!'

'Papa himself, for he said the name,' saucily put in Blanche.

'I think I should like the rule to be made in earnest,' said Ethel.

'What! in order to catch Flora's pence for Cocks Moor?' suggested Harry.

'No, but because it is malice. I mean, that is, if there is dislike, or a grudge in our hearts at them—talking for ever of nasty little miserable irritations makes it worse.'

'Then why do you do it?' asked Flora. 'I heard you only on Sunday declaiming about Fanny Anderson.'

'Ha!' cried out all at once. 'There goes Flora!'

She looked intensely serious and innocent.

‘I know,’ said Ethel. ‘It is the very reason I want the rule to be made, just to stop us, for I am sure we must often say more than is right.’

‘Especially when we come to the pass of declaring that the ninth commandment *cannot* be broken with regard to them,’ observed the Doctor.

‘Most likely they are saying much the same of us,’ said Richard.

‘Or worse,’ rejoined Dr. May. ‘The injured never hates as much as the injurer.’

‘Now papa has said the severest things of all!’ whispered Ethel.

‘Proving the inexpediency of personalities,’ said Dr. May, ‘and in good time enter the evening post.—Why! how now, Mr. May, are you gone mad?’

‘Hallo! why ho, ha! hurrah!’ and up went Harry’s book of decimals to the ceiling, coming down upon a candle, which would have been overturned on Ethel’s work, if it had not been dexterously caught by Richard.

‘Harry!’ indignantly cried Ethel and Flora, ‘see what you have done!’ and the Doctor’s voice called to order, but Harry could not heed. ‘Hear! hear! he has a fortune, an estate.’

‘Who? Tell us—don’t be so absurd. Who?’

‘Why, Mr. Ernescliffe. Here is a letter from Hector. Only listen:

“Did you know we had an old far-away English cousin, one Mr. Halliday? I hardly did, though Alan was named after him, and he belonged to my mother. He was a cross old fellow, and took no notice of us, but within the last year or two, his nephew, or son, or something, died, and now he is just dead, and the lawyer wrote to tell Alan he is heir-at-law. Mr. Ernescliffe, of Maplewood! Does it not sound well? It is a beautiful great place in Shropshire, and Alan and I mean to run off to see it as soon as he can have any time on shore.”

Ethel could not help looking at Margaret, but was ashamed of her impertinence, and coloured violently, whereas her sister did not colour at all, and Norman, looking down, wondered whether Alan would make the voyage.

‘Oh! of course he will; he must,’ said Harry. ‘He would never give up now.’

Norman further wondered whether Hector would remain on the Stoneborough foundation, and Mary hoped they should not lose him; but there was no great readiness to talk over the event, and there soon was a silence broken by Flora, saying, ‘He is no such nobody, as Louisa Anderson said when we—’

Another shout, which caused Flora to take refuge in playing waltzes for the rest of the evening. Moreover, to the extreme satisfaction of Mary, she left her crochet-needle on the floor at

night. While a tumultuous party were pursuing her with it to claim the penny, and Richard was conveying Margaret up-stairs, Ethel found an opportunity of asking her father if he were not very glad of Mr. Ernescliffe's good fortune.

'Yes, very. He is a good fellow, and will make a good use of it.'

'And now, papa, does it not make—you won't say *now* you are sorry he came here.'

She had no answer but a sigh, and a look that made her blush for having ventured so far. She was so much persuaded that great events must ensue, that all the next day, she listened to every ring of the bell, and when one at last was followed by a light, though, to her ears, manly sounding tread, she looked up flushing with expectation.

Behold, she was disappointed. 'Miss Walkingham' was announced, and she rose surprised, for the lady in question had only come to Stoneborough for a couple of days with an infirm mother, who, having known Dr. May in old times, had made it her especial request that he would let her see his daughters. She was to proceed on her journey to-day, and the return of the visit had been by no means expected.

Flora went forward to receive her, wondering to see her so young looking, and so unformed. She held out her hand, with a red wrist, and, as far as could be seen under her veil, coloured when presented to the recumbent Margaret. How she got into her chair, they hardly knew, for Flora was at that moment extremely annoyed by hearing an ill-bred peal of Mary's laughter in the garden, close to the window; but she thought it best to appear unconscious, since she had no power to stop it.

Margaret thought the stranger embarrassed, and kindly inquired for Lady Walkingham.

'Much the same, thank you,' mumbled a voice down in the throat.

A silence, until Margaret tried another question, equally briefly answered; and, after a short interval, the young lady contrived to make her exit, with the same amount of gaucherie as had marked her entrance.

Expressions of surprise at once began, and were so loud, that when Harry entered the room, his inquiry was, 'What's the row?'

'Miss Walkingham,' said Ethel, 'but you won't understand. She seemed half wild! Worse than me!'

'How did you like the pretty improving manners?' asked Harry.

'Manners! she had none,' said Flora. 'She, highly connected! used to the best society!'

'How do you know what the best society do?' asked Harry.

'The poor thing seemed very shy,' said Margaret.

'I don't know about shyness,' said Flora. 'She was stifling a

laugh all the time, like a rude school-boy. And I thought papa said she was pretty!’

‘Aye? Did you think her so?’ asked Harry.

‘A great broad red face—and so awkward!’ cried Flora, indignantly.

‘If one could have seen her face, I think she might have been nice-looking,’ said Margaret. ‘She had pretty golden curls, and merry blue eyes, rather like Harry’s.’

‘Umph!’ said Flora—‘beauty and manners seemed to me much on a par! This is one of papa’s swans, indeed!’

‘I can’t believe it was Miss Walkingham at all!’ said Ethel. ‘It must have been some boy in disguise.’

‘Dear me!’ cried Margaret, starting with the painful timidity of helplessness. ‘Do look whether anything is gone. Where’s the silver inkstand?’

‘You don’t think she could put that into her pocket,’ said Ethel, laughing as she held it up.

‘I don’t know. Do, Harry, see if the umbrellas are safe in the hall. I wish you would, for now I come to remember, the Walkinghams went at nine this morning. Miss Winter said that she saw the old lady helped into the carriage, as she passed.’ Margaret’s eyes looked quite large and terrified. ‘She must have been a spy—the whole gang will come at night! I wish Richard was here. Harry, it really is no laughing matter. You had better give notice to the police.’

The more Margaret was alarmed, the more Harry laughed. ‘Never mind, Margaret, I’ll take care of you! Here’s my dirk. I’ll stick all the robbers.’

‘Harry! Harry! Oh! don’t!’ cried Margaret, raising herself up in an agony of nervous terror. ‘Oh! where is papa? Will nobody ring the bell, and send George for the police?’

‘Police, police! Thieves! Murder! Robbers! Fire! All hands ahoy!’ shouted Harry, his hands making a trumpet over his mouth.

‘Harry! how can you?’ said Ethel, hastily; ‘don’t you see that Margaret is terribly frightened. Can’t you say at once that it was you?’

‘You!’ and Margaret sank back, as there was a general outcry of laughter and wonder.

‘Did you know it, Ethel?’ asked Flora, severely.

‘I only guessed it this moment,’ said Ethel. ‘How well you did it, Harry!’

‘Well!’ said Flora, ‘I did think her dress very like Margaret’s shot silk. I hope you did not do that any harm.’

‘But how did you manage?’ said Ethel. ‘Where did your bonnet come from?’

‘It was a new one of Adam’s wife. Mary got it for me. Come in, Polly, they have found it out. Did you not hear her splitting

with laughing outside the window? I would not let her come in for fear she should spoil all.'

'And I was just going to give her such a scolding for giggling in the garden,' said Flora, 'and to say we had been as bad as Miss Walkingham. You should not have been so awkward, Harry; you nearly betrayed yourself.'

'He had nobody to teach him but Mary,' said Ethel.

'Ah! you should have seen me at my ease in Minster Street. No one suspected me there.'

'In Minster Street. Oh! Harry! you don't really mean it.'

'I do. That was what I did it for. I was resolved to know what the nameless ones said of the Miss Mays.'

Hasty and eager inquiries broke out from Flora and Ethel.

'Oh, Dr. May was very clever, certainly, very clever. Had I seen the daughters? I said I was going to call there, and they said—'

'What, oh, what, Harry?'

'They said Flora was thought pretty, but—and as to Ethel, now, how do you think you came off, Unready?'

'Tell me. They could not say the same of me, at any rate.'

'Quite the reverse! They called Ethel very odd, poor girl.'

'I don't mind,' said Ethel. 'They may say what they please of me; besides that, I believe it is all Harry's own invention.'

'Nay, that is a libel on my invention!' exclaimed Harry. 'If I had drawn on that, could I not have told you something much droller?'

'And was that really all?' said Flora.

'They said—let me see—that all our noses were too long, and, that as to Flora's being a beauty! when their brothers called her—so droll of them—but Harvey called her a stuck-up duchess. In fact, it was the fashion to make a great deal of those Mays.'

'I hope they said something of the sailor brother,' said Ethel.

'No; I found if I stayed to hear much more, I should be knocking Ned down, so I thought it time to take leave before he suspected.'

All this had passed very quickly, with much laughter, and numerous interjections of amusement, and reprobation, or delight. So excited were the young people, that they did not perceive a step on the gravel, till Dr. May entered by the window, and stood among them. His first exclamation was of consternation. 'Margaret! my dear child, what is the matter?'

Only then did her brother and sisters perceive that Margaret was lying back on her cushions, very pale, and panting for breath. She tried to smile and say, 'it was nothing,' and 'she was silly,' but the words were faint, from the palpitation of her heart.

'It was Harry's trick,' said Flora, indignantly, as she flew for the scent-bottle, while her father bent over Margaret. 'Harry dressed himself up, and she was frightened.'

‘O no—no—he did not mean it,’ gasped Margaret—‘don’t.’

‘Harry! I did not think you could be so cowardly and unfeeling! and Dr May’s look was even more reproachful than his words.

Harry was dismayed at his sister’s condition, but the injustice of the wholesale reproach chased away contrition. ‘I did nothing to frighten anyone,’ he said, moodily.

‘Now, Harry, you know how you kept on,’ said Flora, ‘and when you saw she was frightened—’

‘I can have no more of this,’ said Dr. May, seeing that the discussion was injuring Margaret more and more. ‘Go away to my study, sir, and wait till I come to you! All of you out of the room—Flora, fetch the sal volatile.’

‘Let me tell you,’ whispered Margaret. ‘Don’t be angry with Harry. It was—’

‘Not now, not now, my dear. Lie quite still.’

She obeyed, took the sal volatile, and shut her eyes, while he sat leaning anxiously over, watching her. Presently, she opened them, and, looking up, said rather faintly, and trying to smile, ‘I don’t think I can be better till you have heard the rights of it. He did not mean it.’

‘Boys never do mean it,’ was the Doctor’s answer. ‘I hoped better things of Harry.’

‘He had no intention,’ began Margaret, but she still was unfit to talk, and her father silenced her, by promising to go and hear the boy’s own account.

In the hall, he was instantly beset by Ethel and Mary, the former exclaiming, ‘Papa! you are quite mistaken. It was very foolish of Margaret to be so frightened! He did nothing at all to frighten anyone.’

Ethel’s mode of pleading was unfortunate; the ‘very foolish of Margaret’ were the very words to displease.

‘Do not interfere!’ said her father, sternly. ‘You only encourage him in his wanton mischief, and no one takes any heed how he torments my poor Margaret.’

‘Papa!’ cried Harry, passionately bursting open the study door, ‘tormenting Margaret was the last thing I would do.’

‘That is not the way to speak, Harry. What have you been doing?’

With rapid, agitated utterance, Harry made his confession. At another time the Doctor would have treated the matter as a joke carried too far, but which, while it called for censure, was very amusing; but now the explanation that the disguise had been assumed to impose on the Andersons, only added to his displeasure.

‘You seem to think you have a license to play off any impertinent freaks you please, without consideration for anyone,’ he said; ‘but I tell you it is not so. As long as you are under my roof, you shall feel my authority, and you shall spend the rest of the day in

your room. I hope quietness there will bring you to a better mind, but I am disappointed in you. A boy who can choose such a time, and such subjects, for insolent, unfeeling, practical jokes, cannot be in a fit state for Confirmation.'

'Oh! papa! papa!' cried the two girls, in tones of entreaty—while Harry, with a burning face and hasty step, dashed up-stairs without a word.

'You have been as bad!' said Dr. May. 'I say nothing to you, Mary, you knew no better; but, to see you, Ethel, first encouraging him in his impertinence, and terrifying Margaret so, that I dare say she may be a week getting over it, and now defending him, and calling her silly, is unbearable. I cannot trust one of you!'

'Only listen, papa!'

'I will have no altercation; I must go back to Margaret, since no one else has the slightest consideration for her.'

An hour had passed away, when Richard knocked at Ethel's door to tell her that tea was ready.

'I have a great mind not to go down,' said Ethel, as he looked in, and saw her seated with a book.

'What do you mean?'

'I cannot bear to go down while poor Harry is so unjustly used.'

'Hush, Ethel!'

'I cannot hush! Just because Margaret fancies robbers and murderers, and all sorts of nonsense, as she always did, is poor Harry to be accused of wantonly terrifying her, and shut up, and cut off from Confirmation? and just when he is going away, too! It is unkind, and unjust, and—'

'Ethel, you will be sorry—'

'Papa will be sorry,' continued Ethel, disregarding the caution. 'It is very unfair, and I *will* say so. It was all nonsense of Margaret's, but he will always make everything give way to her! And poor Harry, just going to sea. No, Ritchie, I cannot come down; I cannot behave as usual.'

'You will grieve Margaret much more,' said Richard.

'I can't help that—she should not have made such a fuss.'

Richard was somewhat in difficulties how to answer, but at that moment Harry's door, which was next, was slightly opened—and his voice said, 'Go down, Ethel. The Captain may punish anyone he pleases, and it is mutiny in the rest of the crew to take his part.'

'Harry is in the right,' said Richard. 'It is our duty not to question our father's judgments. It would be wrong of you to stay up.'

'Wrong?' said Ethel.

'Of course. It would be against the articles of war,' said Harry, opening his door another inch. 'But Ritchie, I say, do tell me whether it has hurt Margaret.'

'She is better now,' said Richard, 'but she has a head-ache chiefly, I believe, from distress at having brought this on you. She is very sorry for her fright.'

'I had not the least intention of frightening the most fearsome little tender mouse on earth,' said Harry.

'No indeed,' said Ethel.

'And at another time it would not have signified,' said Richard; 'but, you know, Margaret always was timid, and now, the not being able to move, and the being out of health, has made her nerves weak, so that she cannot help it.'

'The fault was in our never heeding her when we were so eager to hear Harry's story,' said Ethel. 'That was what made the palpitation so bad. But, now papa knows all, does he not understand about Harry?'

'He was obliged to go out as soon as Margaret was better,' said Richard, 'and was scarcely come in when I came up.'

'Go down, Ethel,' repeated Harry. 'Never mind me. Norman told me that sort of joke never answered, and I might have minded him.'

The voice was very much troubled, and it brought back that burning sensation of indignant tears to Ethel's eyes.

'O Harry! you did not deserve to be so punished for it.'

'That is what you are not to say,' returned Harry. 'I ought not to have played the trick, and—and just now too—but I always forget things—'

The door shut, and they fancied they heard sobs. Ethel groaned, but made no opposition to following her brother down to tea. Margaret lay, wan and exhausted, on the sofa—the Doctor looked very melancholy and rather stern, and the others were silent. Ethel had begun to hope for the warm re-action she had so often known after a hasty fit, but it did not readily come; Harry was boy instead of girl—the fault and its consequence had been more serious—and the anxiety for the future was greater. Besides, he had not fully heard the story; Harry, in his incoherent narration, had not excused himself, and Margaret's panic had appeared more as if inspired by him, than, as it was, in fact, the work of her fancy.

Thus the evening passed gloomily away, and it was not till the others had said good night, that Dr. May began to talk over the affair with his eldest son, who then was able to lay before him the facts of the case, as gathered from his sisters. He listened with a manner as though it were a reproof, and then said, sadly, 'I am afraid I was in a passion.'

'It was very wrong in Harry,' said Richard, 'and particularly unlucky it should happen with the Andersons.'

'Very thoughtless,' said the Doctor, 'no more, even as regarded Margaret; but thoughtlessness should not have been treated as a crime.'

'I wish we could see him otherwise,' said Richard.

'He wants—' and there Dr. May stopped short, and, taking up his candle, slowly mounted the stairs, and looked into Harry's room. The boy was in bed, but started up on hearing his father's step, and exclaimed, 'Papa, I am very sorry! Is Margaret better?'

'Yes, she is; and I understand now, Harry, that her alarm was an accident. I beg your pardon for thinking for a moment that it was otherwise—'

'No,' interrupted Harry, 'of course I could never mean to frighten her; but I did not leave off the moment I saw she was afraid, because it was so very ridiculous, and I did not guess it would hurt her.'

'I see, my honest boy. I do not blame you, for you did not know how much harm a little terror does to a person in her helpless state. But, indeed, Harry, though you did not deserve such anger as mine was, it is a serious thing that you should be so much set on fun and frolic as to forget all considerations, especially at such a time as this. It takes away from much of my comfort in sending you into the world; and for higher things—how can I believe you really impressed and reverent, if the next minute—'

'I'm not fit! I'm not fit!' sobbed Harry, hiding his face.

'Indeed, I hardly know whether it is not so,' said the Doctor. 'You are under the usual age, and, though I know you wish to be a good boy, yet I don't feel sure that these wild spirits do not carry away everything serious, and whether it is right to bring one so thoughtless to—'

'No, no,' and Harry cried bitterly, and his father was deeply grieved, but no more could then be said, and they parted for the night—Dr. May saying, as he went away, 'You understand, that it is not as a punishment for your trick, if I do not take you to Mr. Ramsden for a ticket, but that I cannot be certain whether it is right to bring you to such solemn privileges while you do not seem to me to retain steadily any grave or deep feelings. Perhaps your mother would have better helped you.'

And Dr. May went away, to mourn over what he viewed as far greater sins than those of his son.

Anger had, indeed, given place to sorrow, and all were grave the next morning, as if each had something to be forgiven.

Margaret, especially, felt guilty of the fears which, perhaps, had not been sufficiently combated in her days of health, and now were beyond control, and had occasioned so much pain. Ethel grieved over the words she had yesterday spoken in haste of her father and sister; Mary knew herself to have been an accomplice in the joke, and Norman blamed himself for not having taken the trouble to perceive that Harry had not been talking rhodomontade, when he had communicated 'his capital scheme' the previous morning.

The decision as to the Confirmation was a great grief to all.

Flora consoled herself by observing that, as he was so young, no one need know it, nor miss him; and Ethel, with a trembling, almost sobbing voice, enumerated all Harry's excellencies, his perfect truth, his kindness, his generosity, his flashes of intense feeling—declared that nobody ought to be Confirmed if he were not, and begged and entreated that Mr. Wilmot might be written to, and consulted. She would almost have done so herself, if Richard had not shown her that it would be undutiful.

Harry himself was really subdued. He made no question as to the propriety of the decision, but rather felt his own unworthiness, and was completely humbled and downcast. When a note came from Mrs. Anderson, saying that she was convinced that it could not have been Dr. May's wish that she should be exposed to the indignity of a practical joke, and that a young lady of the highest family should have been insulted, no one had spirits 'to laugh at the terms; and when Dr. May said, 'What is to be done?' Harry turned crimson, and was evidently trying to utter something.

'I see nothing for it but for him to ask their pardon,' said Dr. May—and a sound was heard, not very articulate, but expressing full assent.

'That is right,' said the Doctor. 'I'll come with you.'

'O, thank you!' cried Harry, looking up.

They set off at once. Mrs. Anderson was neither an unpleasing nor unkind person—her chief defect being a blind admiration of her sons and daughters, which gave her, in speaking of them, a tone of pretension that she would never have shown on her own account.

Her displeasure was pacified in a moment by the sight of the confused contrition of the culprit, coupled with his father's frank and kindly tone of avowal, that it had been a foolish improper frolic, and that he had been much displeased with him for it.

'Say no more—pray say no more, Dr. May. We all know how to overlook a sailor's frolic, and, I am sure, Master Harry's present behaviour—but you'll take a bit of luncheon,' and, as something was said of going home to the early dinner, 'I am sure you will wait one minute. Master Harry must have a piece of my cake, and allow me to drink to his success.'

Poor Mr. May! to be called Master Harry, and treated to sweet cake! But he saw his father thought he ought to endure, and he even said, 'thank you.'

The cake stuck in his throat, however, when Mrs. Anderson and her daughters opened their full course of praise on their dear Harvey, and dearest Edward, telling all the flattering things Dr. Hoxton had said of the order into which Harvey had brought the school, and insisting on Dr. May's reading the copy of the testimonial that he had carried to Oxford. 'I knew you would be kind enough to rejoice,' said Mrs. Anderson, 'and that you would have no—no feeling about Mr. Norman; for, of course, at his age, a

little matter is nothing, and it must be better for the dear boy himself to be a little while under a friend like Harvey, than to have authority while so young.'

'I believe it has done him no harm,' was all that the Doctor could bring himself to say; and thinking that he and his sons had endured quite enough, he took his leave as soon as Harry had convulsively bolted the last mouthful.

Not a word was spoken all the way home. Harry's own trouble had overpowered even this subject of resentment. On Sunday, the notice of the Confirmation was read. It was to take place on the following Thursday, and all those who had already given in their names, were to come to Mr. Ramsden to apply for their tickets. While this was read, large tear-drops were silently falling on poor Harry's book.

Ethel and Norman walked together in the twilight, in deep lamentation over their brother's deprivation, which seemed especially to humble them; 'for,' said Norman, 'I am sure no one can be more resolved on doing right than July, and he has got through school better than I did.'

Yes,' said Ethel; 'if we don't get into his sort of scrape, it is only that we are older, not better. I am sure mine are worse, my letting Aubrey be nearly burnt—my neglects.'

'Papa must be doing right,' said Norman, 'but for July to be turned back when we are taken, makes me think of man judging only by outward appearance.'

'A few outrageous-looking acts of giddiness that are so much grieved over, may not be half so bad as the hundreds of wandering thoughts that one forgets, because no one else can see them!' said Ethel.

Meanwhile, Harry and Mary were sitting twisted together into a sort of bundle, on the same footstool, by Margaret's sofa. Harry had begged of her to hear him say the Catechism once more, and Mary had joined with him in the repetition. There was to be only one more Sunday at home.

'And that!' he said, and sighed.

Margaret knew what he meant, for the Feast was to be spread for those newly admitted to share it. She only said a caressing word of affection.

'I wonder when I shall have another chance,' said Harry. 'If we should get to Australia, or New Zealand—but then, perhaps, there would be no Confirmation going on, and I might be worse by that time.'

'O, you must not let that be!'

'Why, you see, if I can't be good here, with all this going on, what shall I do among those fellows, away from all?'

'You will have one friend!'

'Mr. Ernescliffe! You are always thinking of him, Margaret,

but perhaps he may not go, and if he should, a lieutenant cannot do much for a midshipman. No, I thought, when I was reading with my father, that *somehow*, it might help me to do what *it* called putting away childish things—don't you know? I might be able to be stronger and steadier, *somehow*. And then, if—if—you know, if I did tumble overboard, or any thing of that sort, there is *that* about the—what they will go to next Sunday, being necessary to salvation.'

Harry laid down his head and cried; Margaret could not speak for tears; and Mary was incoherently protesting against any notion of his falling overboard.

'It is *generally* necessary, Harry,' Margaret said, at last—'not in impossible cases.'

'Yes, if it had been impossible, but it was not; if I had not been a mad goose all this time, but when a bit of fun gets hold of me, I can't think. And if I am too bad for that, I am too bad for—for—and I shall never see mamma again! Margaret, it almost makes me af—afraid to sail.'

'Harry, don't, don't talk so!' sobbed Mary. 'O do come to papa, and let us beg and pray. Take hold of my hand, and Margaret will beg too, and when he sees how sorry you are, I am sure he will forgive, and let you be Confirmed.' She would have dragged him after her.

'No, Mary,' said Harry, resisting her. 'It is not that he does not forgive. You don't understand. It is what is right. And he cannot help it, or make it right for me, if I am such a horrid wretch that I can't keep grave thoughts in my head. I might do it again after that, just the same.'

'You have been grave enough of late!' said Mary.

'This was enough to make me so,' said Harry; 'but even at Church, since I came home, I have behaved ill! I kicked Tom, to make him look at old Levitt asleep, and then I went on, because he did not like it. I know I am too idle.'

On the Tuesday, Dr. May had said he would take Norman and Etheldred to Mr. Ramsden. Ethel was gravely putting on her walking-dress, when she heard her father's voice calling Harry, and she started with a joyful hope.

There, indeed, when she came down stairs, stood Harry, his cap in his hand, and his face serious, but with a look on it that had as much subdued joy, as awe.

'Dear, dear Harry! you are going with us then?'

'Yes, papa wrote to ask what Mr. Wilmot thought, and he said—'

Harry broke off, as his father advanced, and gave her the letter itself to read. Mr. Wilmot answered, that he certainly should not refuse such a boy as Harry, on the proof of such entire penitence and deep feeling. Whether to bring him to the further privilege,

might be another question; but, as far as the Confirmation was concerned, the opinion was decided.

Norman and Ethel were too happy for words, as they went arm in arm along the street, leaving their dear sailor to be leant on by his father.

Harry's sadness was gone, but he still was guarded and gentle, during the few days that followed; he seemed to have learnt thought, and in his gratitude for the privileges he had so nearly missed, to rate them more highly than he might otherwise have done. Indeed, the doubt for the Sunday gave him a sense of probation.

The Confirmation day came. Mr. Rivers had asked that his daughter might be with Miss May, and Ethel had therefore to be called for in the Abbotstoke carriage, quite contrary to her wishes, as she had set her heart on the walk to Church with her father and brothers. Flora would not come, for fear of crowding Mr. Rivers, who, with Mrs. Larpent, accompanied his darling.

'O Margaret,' said Flora, after putting her sister into the carriage, 'I wish we had put Ethel into a veil! There is Meta all white from head to foot, with such a veil! and Ethel, in her little white cap, looks as if she might be Lucy Taylor, only not so pretty.'

'Mamma thought the best rule was to take the dress that needs least attention from ourselves, and will be least noticed,' said Margaret.

'There is Fanny Anderson gone by in the fly with a white veil on!' cried Mary, dashing in.

'Then I am glad Ethel has not one,' said Flora.

Margaret looked annoyed, but she had not found the means of checking Flora without giving offence; and she could only call Mary and Blanche to order, beg them to think of what the others were doing, and offer to read to them a little tale on Confirmation.

Flora sat and worked, and Margaret, stealing a glance at her, understood, that, in her quiet way, she resented the implied reproof. 'Making the children think me worldly and frivolous!' she thought, 'as if Margaret did not know that I think and feel as much as any reasonable person!'

The party came home in due time, and, after one kiss to Margaret, given in silence, dispersed, for they could not yet talk of what had passed.

Only Ethel, as she met Richard on the stairs, said, 'Ritchie, do you know what the Bishop's text was? "No man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."'

'Yes?' said Richard, interrogatively.

'I thought it might be a voice to me,' said Ethel; 'besides what it says to all, about our Christian course. It seems to tell

me not to be out of heart about all those vexations at Cocksmoor Is it not a sort of putting our hand to the plough ?’

Dr. May gave his own history of the Confirmation to Margaret. ‘It was a beautiful thing to watch,’ he said, ‘the faces of our own set. Those four were really like a poem. There was little Meta in her snowy whiteness, looking like innocence itself, hardly knowing of evil, or pain, or struggle, as that soft earnest voice made her vow to be ready for it all, almost as unscathed and unconscious of trial, as when they made it for her at her baptism—pretty little thing—may she long be as happy. And for our own Ethel, she looked as if she was promising on and on, straight into eternity. I heard her “I do,” dear child, and it was in such a tone as if she meant to be ever *doing*.’

‘And for the boys?’

‘There was Norman grave and steadfast, as if he knew what he was about, and was manfully and calmly ready—he might have been a young knight, watching his armour.’

‘And so he is!’ said Margaret, softly. ‘And poor Harry?’

The Doctor could hardly command voice to tell her. ‘Poor Harry, he was last of all, he turned his back and looked into the corner of the seat, till all the voices had spoken, and then turned about in haste, and the two words came on the end of a sob.’

‘You will not keep him away on Sunday?’ said Margaret.

‘Far be it from me. I know not who should come, if he should not.’



CHAPTER XXVI.

‘What matter, whether through delight,
Or led through vale of tears,
Or seen at once, or hid from sight,
The glorious way appears?
If step by step the path we see,
That leads, my Saviour, up to thee!’

‘I COULD not help it,’ said Dr. May—‘that little witch—’

‘Meta Rivers? Oh! what, papa?’

‘It seems that Wednesday is her birthday, and nothing will serve her but to eat her dinner in the old Roman camp.’

‘And are we to go? O which of us?’

‘Everyone of anything like rational years. Blanche is especially invited.’

‘There were transports till it was recollected, that on Thursday morning school would recommence, and that on Friday Harry must join his ship.’

However, the Roman camp had long been an object of their desires, and Margaret was glad that the last day should have a brilliancy, so she would not hear of anyone remaining to keep her

company, talked of the profit she should gain by a leisure day, and took ardent interest in everyone's preparations and expectations, in Ethel's researches into country histories and classical dictionaries, Flora's sketching intentions, Norman's promises of *campanula glomerata*, and a secret whispered into her ear by Mary and Harry.

'Meta's weather,' as they said, when the August sun rose fresh and joyous; and great was the unnecessary bustle, and happy confusion, from six o'clock till eleven, when Dr. May, who was going to visit patients some way further on the same road, carried off Harry and Mary, to set them down at the place.

The rest were called for by Mr. Rivers's carriage and break. Mrs. Charles Wilmot and her little girl were the only additions to the party, and Meta, putting Blanche into the carriage to keep company with her contemporary, went herself in the break. What a brilliant little fairy she was, in her pink summer robes, fluttering like a butterfly, and with the same apparent felicity in basking in joy, all gaiety, glee, and light-heartedness in making others happy. On they went, through honey-suckled lanes, catching glimpses of sunny fields of corn falling before the reaper, and happy knots of harvest folks dining beneath the shelter of their sheaves, with the sturdy old green umbrella sheltering them from the sun.

Snatches of song, peals of laughter, merry nonsense, passed from one to the other; Norman, roused into blitheness, found wit, the young ladies found laughter, and Richard's eyes and mouth looked very pretty, as they smiled their quiet diversion.

At last, his face drawn all into one silent laugh, he directed the eyes of the rest to a high green mound, rising immediately before them, where stood two little figures, one with a spy-glass, intently gazing the opposite way.

At the same time came the halt, and Norman, bounding out, sprang lightly and nimbly up the side of the mound, and, while the spy-glass was yet pointed full at Wales, had hold of a pair of stout legs, and with the words, 'Keep a good look out!' had tumbled Mr. May headforemost down the grassy slope, with Mary rolling after.

Harry's first outcry was for his precious glass—his second was, not at his fall, but that they should have come from the east, when, by the compass, Stoneborough was north-north-west. And then the boys took to tumbling over one another, while Meta frolicked joyously, with Nipen after her, up and down the mounds, chased by Mary and Blanche, who were wild with glee.

By-and-by she joined Ethel, and Norman was summoned to help them to trace out the old lines of encampment, ditch, rampart, and gates—happy work on those slopes of fresh turf, embroidered with every minute blossom of the moor—thyme, birdsfoot, eyebright, and dwarf purple thistle, buzzed and hummed over by busy, black-tailed, yellow-banded dumbledores, the breezy wind blowing softly in their faces, and the expanse of country-wooded hill, verdant

pasture, amber harvest-field, winding river, smoke-canopied-town and brown moor, melting greyly away to the mountain heads.

Now in sun, now in shade, the bright young antiquaries surveyed the old banks, and talked wisely of vallum and fossa, of legion and cohort, of Agricola and Suetonius, and discussed the delightful probability, that this might have been raised in the war with Caractacus, whence, argued Ethel, since Caractacus was certainly Arviragus, it must have been the very spot where Imogen met Posthumus again. Was not yonder the very high road to Milford Haven, and thus must not 'fair Fidele's grassy tomb' be in the immediate neighborhood?

Then followed the suggestion that the mound in the middle was a good deal like an ancient tomb, where, as Blanche interposed with some of the lore lately caught from Ethel's studies, 'they used to bury their tears in wheelbarrows,' while Norman observed it was the more probable, as fair Fidele never was buried at all.

The idea of a search enchanted the young ladies. 'It was the right sort of vehicle, evidently,' said Norman, looking at Harry, who had been particularly earnest in recommending that it should be explored; and Meta declared that if they could but find the least trace, her papa would be delighted to go regularly to work, and reveal all the treasures.

Richard seemed a little afraid of the responsibility of treasure-trove, but he was overruled by a chorus of eager voices, and dispossessed of the trowel, which he had brought to dig up some down-gentians for the garden. While Norman set to work as pioneer, some skipped about in wild ecstacy, and Ethel knelt down to peer into the hole.

Very soon there was a discovery—an eager outcry—some pottery! Roman vessels—a red thing that might have been a lamp another that might have been a lachrymatory.

'Well,' said Ethel, 'you know, Norman, I always told you that the children's pots and pans in the clay ditch were very like Roman pottery.'

'Posthumus's patty pan!' said Norman, holding it up. 'No doubt this was the bottle filled with the old queen's tears when Cloten was killed.'

'You see it is very small,' added Harry; 'she could not squeeze out many.'

'Come now, I do believe you are laughing at it!' said Meta, taking the derided vessels into her hands. 'Now, they really are genuine, and very curious things, are not they, Flora?'

Flora and Ethel admired and speculated till there was a fresh, and still more exciting discovery—a coin, actually a medal, with the head of an emperor upon it—not a doubt of his high nose being Roman. Meta was certain that she knew one exactly like him among her father's gems. Ethel was resolved that he should be

Claudius, and began decyphering the defaced inscription THVRVS. She tried Claudius's whole torrent of names, and, at last, made it into a contraction of Tiberius, which highly satisfied her.

Then Meta, in her turn, read D. V. X., which, as Ethel said, was all she could wish—of course it was *dux et imperator*, and Harry muttered into Norman's ear, 'ducks and geese!' and then heaved a sigh, as he thought of the Dux no longer. 'V. V.,' continued Meta, 'what can that mean?'

'Five, five, of course,' said Flora.

'No, no! I have it, *Venus Victrix*,' said Ethel, 'the ancestral Venus! Ha! don't you see? there she is on the other side, crowning Claudius.'

'Then there is an E!'

'Something about *Æneas*,' suggested Norman, gravely.

But Ethel was sure that could not be, because there was no diphthong; and a fresh theory was just being started, when Blanche's head was thrust in to know what made them all so busy.

'Why, Ethel, what are you doing with Harry's old medal of the Duke of Wellington?'

Poor Meta and Ethel, what a downfall! Meta was sure that Norman had known it the whole time, and he owned to having guessed it from Harry's importunity for the search. Harry and Mary had certainly made good use of their time, and great was the mirth over the trap so cleverly set—the more when it was disclosed that Dr. May had been a full participator in the scheme, had suggested the addition of the pottery, had helped Harry to some liquid to efface part of the inscription, and had even come up with them to plant the snare in the most plausible corner for researches.

Meta, enchanted with the joke, flew off to try to take in her governess and Mrs. Wilmot, whom she found completing their leisurely promenade, and considering where they should spread the dinner.

The sight of those great baskets of good fare was appetizing, and the company soon collected on the shady turf, where Richard made himself extremely useful, and the feast was spread without any worse mishap than Nipen's running away with half a chicken, of which he was robbed, as Tom reported, by a surly looking dog that watched in the outskirts of the camp, and caused Tom to return nearly as fast as the poor little white marauder.

Meta 'very immorally,' as Norman told her, comforted Nipen with a large share of her sandwiches. Harry armed himself with a stick, and Mary with a stone, and marched off to the attack, but saw no signs of the enemy, and had begun to believe him a figment of Tom's imagination, when Mary spied him under a bush, lying at the feet of a boy, with whom he was sharing the spoil.

Harry called out rather roughly, 'Hollo! what are you doing there?'

The boy jumped up, the dog growled, Mary shrank behind her brother, and begged him not to be cross to the poor boy, but to come away. Harry repeated his question.

‘Please, Sir, Toby brought it to me.’

‘What, is Toby your dog?’

‘Yes, Sir.

‘Are you so hungry as to eat dog’s meat?’

‘I have not had nothing before to-day, Sir.’

‘Why, where do you live? hereabouts?’

‘O no, Sir; I lived with grandmother up in Cheshire, but she is dead now, and father is just come home from sea, and he wrote down I was to be sent to him at Portsmouth, to go to sea with him.’

‘How do you live? do you beg your way?’

‘No, Sir; father sent up a pound in a letter, only Nanny Brooks said I owed some to her for my victuals, and I have not much of it left, and bread comes dear, so when Toby brought me this bit of meat, I was glad of it, Sir, but I would not have taken it—’

The boy was desired to wait while the brother and sister, in breathless excitement, rushed back with their story.

Mrs. Wilnot was at first inclined to fear that the naval part of it had been inspired by Harry’s uniform, but the examination of Jem Jennings put it beyond a doubt that he spoke nothing but the truth; and the choicest delight of the feast was the establishing him and Toby behind the barrow, and feeding them with such viands as they had probably never seen before.

The boy could not read writing, but he had his father’s letter in his pocket, and Mary capered at the delightful coincidence, on finding that Jem Jennings was actually a quarter-master on board the *Alcestitis*. It gave a sort of property in the boy, and she almost grudged Meta the having been first to say that she would pay for the rest of his journey, instead of doing it by subscription.

However, Mary had a consolation, she would offer to take charge of Toby; who, as Harry observed, would otherwise have been drowned—he could not be taken on board. To be sure, he was a particularly ugly animal, rough, grisly, short-legged, long-backed, and with an apology for a tail—but he had a redeeming pair of eyes, and he and Jem lived on terms of such close friendship, that he would have been miserable in leaving him to the mercy of Nanny Brooks.

So, after their meal, Jem and Toby were bidden to wait for Dr. May’s coming, and fell asleep together on the green bank, while the rest either sketched, or wandered, or botanized. Flora acted the grown-up lady with Mrs. Wilnot, and Meta found herself sitting by Ethel, asking her a great many questions about Margaret, and her home, and what it could be like to be one of such a numerous family. Flora had always turned aside from personal matters, as uninteresting to her companion, and, in spite of Meta’s admiration, and the mutual wish to be intimate, confidence did not spring up

spontaneously, as it had done with the Doctor, and, in that single hour, with Margaret. Blunt as Ethel was, her heartiness of manner gave a sense of real progress in friendship. Their Confirmation vows seemed to make a link, and Meta's unfeigned enthusiasm for the Doctor was the sure road to Ethel's heart. She was soon telling how glad Margaret was that he had been drawn into taking pleasure in to-day's scheme, since, not only were his spirits tried by the approach of Harry's departure, but he had, within the last few days, been made very sad by reading and answering Aunt Flora's first letter on the news of last October's misfortune.

'My aunt in New Zealand,' explained Ethel.

'Have you an aunt in New Zealand?' cried Meta. 'I never heard of her!'

'Did not you? Oh! she does write such charming long letters!'

'Is she Dr. May's sister?'

'No; he was an only child. She is dear mamma's sister. I don't remember her, for she went out when I was a baby, but Richard and Margaret were so fond of her. They say she used to play with them and tell them stories, and sing Scotch songs to them. Margaret says the first sorrow of her life was Aunt Flora's going away.'

'Did she live with them?'

'Yes; after grandpapa died, she came to live with them, but then Mr. Arnott came about. I ought not to speak evil of him, for he is my godfather, but we do wish he had not carried off Aunt Flora! That letter of hers showed me what a comfort it would be to papa to have her here.'

'Perhaps she will come.'

'No; Uncle Arnott has too much to do. It was a pretty story altogether. He was an officer at Edinburgh, and fell in love with Aunt Flora, but my grandfather Mackenzie thought him too poor to marry her, and it was all broken off, and they tried to think no more of it. But grandpapa died, and she came to live here, and somehow Mr. Arnott turned up again, quartered at Whitford, and papa talked over my Uncle Mackenzie, and helped them—and Mr. Arnott thought the best way would be to go out to the colonies. They went when New Zealand was very new, and a very funny life they had! Once they had their house burnt in Heki's rebellion—and Aunt Flora saw a Maori walking about in her best Sunday bonnet—but, in general, everything has gone on very well, and he has a great farm, besides an office under government.'

'Oh; so he went out as a settler; I was in hopes it was as a missionary'

'I fancy Aunt Flora has done a good deal that may be called missionary work,' said Ethel, 'teaching the Maori women and girls. They call her mother, and she has quite a doctor's shop for them,

and tries hard to teach them to take proper care of their poor little children, when they are ill—and she cuts out clothes for the whole pah, that is, the village.'

'And are they Christians?'

'Oh! to be sure they are now! They meet in the pah for prayers every morning and evening—they used to have a hoe struck against a bit of metal for a signal, and when papa heard of it, he gave them a bell, and they were so delighted. Now there comes a Clergyman every fourth Sunday, and, on the others, Uncle Arnott reads part of the service to the English near, and the Maori teacher to his people.'

Meta asked ravenously for more details, and when she had pretty well exhausted Ethel's stock, she said, 'How nice it must be! Ethel, did you ever read the "Faithful Little Girl?"'

'Yes; it was one of Margaret's old Sunday books. I often recollected it before I was allowed to begin Cocks Moor.'

'I'm afraid I am very like Lucilla!' said Meta.

'What? In wishing to be a boy, that you might be a Missionary!' said Ethel. 'Not in being quite so cross at home?' she added, laughing.

'I am not cross, because I have no opportunity,' said Meta.

'No opportunity. Oh, Meta! if people wish to be cross, it is easy enough to find grounds for it. There is always the moon to cry for.'

'Really and truly,' said Meta, thoughtfully, 'I never do meet with any reasonable trial of temper, and I am often afraid it cannot be right or safe to live so entirely at ease, and without contradictions.'

'Well, but—' said Ethel, 'it is the state of life in which you are placed.'

'Yes, but are we meant never to have vexations?'

'I thought you had them,' said Ethel. 'Margaret told me about your maid. That would have worried some people, and made them horridly cross.'

'Oh! no rational person,' cried Meta. 'It was so nice to think of her being with the poor mother, and I was quite interested in managing for myself; besides, you know, it was just a proof how one learns to be selfish, that it had never occurred to me that I ought to spare her.'

'And your school children—you were in some trouble about them?'

'Oh! that is pleasure.'

'I thought you had a class you did not like.'

'I like them now—they are such steady plodding girls, so much in earnest, and one, that has been neglected, is so pleased and touched by kindness. I would not give them up for anything now—they are just fit for my capacity.'

‘Do you mean that nothing ever goes wrong with you, or that you do not mind anything—which?’

‘Nothing goes wrong enough with me to give me a handsome excuse for minding it.’

‘Then it must be all your good temper.’

‘I don’t think so,’ said Meta—‘it is that nothing is ever disagreeable to me.’

‘Stay,’ said Ethel, ‘if the ill-temper was in you, you would only be the crosser for being indulged—at least, so books say. And I am sure myself, that it is not whether things are disagreeable or not, but whether one’s will is with them, that signifies.’

‘I don’t quite understand.’

‘Why—I have seen the boys do for play, and done myself, what would have been a horrid hardship if one had been made to do it. I never liked any lessons as well as those I did without being obliged, and always, when there is a thing I hate very much in itself, I can get up an interest in it, by resolving that I will do it well, or fast, or something—if I *can* stick my will to it, it is like a lever, and it is done. Now I think it must be the same with you, only your will is more easily set at it than mine.’

‘What makes me uncomfortable is, that I feel as if I never followed anything but my will.’

Ethel screwed up her face, as if the eyes of her mind were pursuing some thought almost beyond her. ‘If our will and our duty run the same,’ she said, ‘that can’t be wrong. The better people are, the more they “love what He commands,” you know. In Heaven they have no will but His.’

‘Oh! but Ethel,’ cried Meta distressed, ‘that is putting it too nigh. Won’t you understand what I mean? We have learnt so much lately about self-denial, and crossing one’s own inclinations, and enduring hardness. And here I live with two dear kind people, who only try to keep every little annoyance from my path. I can’t wish for a thing without getting it—I am waited on all day long, and I feel like one of the women that are at ease—one of the careless daughters.’

‘I think still papa would say it was your happy contented temper that made you find no vexation.’

‘But that sort of temper is not goodness. I was born with it; I never did mind anything, not even being punished, they say, unless I knew papa was grieved, which always did make me unhappy enough. I laughed, and went to play most saucily, whatever they did to me. If I had striven for the temper, it would be worth having, but it is my nature. And Ethel,’ she added, in a low voice, as the tears came into her eyes, ‘don’t you remember last Sunday? I felt myself so vain and petted a thing! as if I had no share in the Cup of suffering, and did not deserve to call myself a member—it seemed ungrateful.’

Ethel felt ashamed, as she heard of warmer feelings than her own had been, expressed in that lowered trembling voice, and she sought for the answer that would only come to her mind in sense, not at first in words. 'Discipline,' said she, 'would not that show the willingness to have the part? Taking the right times for refusing oneself some pleasant thing.'

'Would not that be only making up something for oneself?' said Meta.

'No, the Church orders it. It is in the Prayer-book,' said Ethel. 'I mean one can do little secret things—not read story books on those days, or keep some tiresome sort of work for them. It is very trumpery, but it keeps the remembrance, and it is not so much as if one did not heed.'

'I'll think,' said Meta, sighing. 'If only I felt myself at work, not to please myself, but to be of use. Ha!' she cried, springing up, 'I do believe I see Dr. May coming!'

'Let us run and meet him,' said Ethel.

They did so, and he called out his wishes of many happy returns of blithe days to the little birthday queen, then added, 'You both look grave, though—have they deserted you?'

'No, papa, we have been having a talk,' said Ethel. 'May I tell him, Meta? I want to know what he says.'

Meta had not bargained for this, but she was very much in earnest, and there was nothing formidable in Dr. May, so she assented.

'Meta is longing to be at work—she thinks she is of no use,' said Ethel—'she says she never does anything but please herself.'

'Pleasing oneself is not the same as trying to please oneself,' said Dr. May, kindly.

'And she thinks it cannot be safe or right,' added Ethel, 'to live that happy bright life, as if people without care or trouble could not be living as Christians are meant to live. Is that it, Meta?'

'Yes, I think it is,' said Meta. 'I seem to be only put here to be made much of!'

'What did David say, Meta?' returned Dr. May.

'My Shepherd is the living Lord,
Nothing therefore I need:
In pastures fair, near pleasant streams,
He setteth me to feed.'

'Then you think,' said Meta, much touched, 'that I ought to look on this as "the pastures fair," and be thankful. I hope I was not unthankful.'

'O, no,' said Ethel. 'It was the wish to bear hardness, and be a good soldier, was it not?'

'Ah! my dear,' he said, 'the rugged path and dark valley will come in His own fit time. Depend upon it, the good Shepherd is giving you what is best for you in the green meadow, and if you lay

hold on His rod and staff in your sunny days.—' He stopped short, and turned to his daughter.

'Ethel, they sang that Psalm the first Sunday I brought your mamma home?'

Meta was much affected, and began to put together what the father and daughter had said. Perhaps the little modes of secret discipline, of which Ethel had spoken, might be the true means of clasping the staff—perhaps she had been impatient, and wanting in humility in craving for the strife, when her armour was scarce put on.

Dr. May spoke once again. 'Don't let anyone long for external trial. The offering of a free heart is the thing. To offer praise is the great object of all creatures in heaven and earth. If the happier we are, the more we praise, then all is well.'

But the serious discussion was suddenly broken off.

Others had seen Dr. May's approach, and Harry and Mary rushed down in dismay at their story having, as they thought, been forestalled. However, they had it all to themselves, and the Doctor took up the subject as keenly as could have been hoped, but the poor boy being still fast asleep, after, probably, much fatigue, he would not then waken him to examine him, but came and sat down in the semicircle, formed by a terraced bank of soft turf, where Mrs. Larpent, Mrs. Wilmot, Richard, and Flora, had for some time taken up their abode. Meta brought him the choice little basket of fruit which she had saved for him, and all delighted in having him there, evidently enjoying the rest and sport very much, as he reposed on the fragrant slope, eating grapes, and making inquiries as to the antiquities lately discovered.

Norman gave an exceedingly droll account of the great Roman Emperor, Tiberius V. V., and Meta, correcting it, there was a regular gay skirmish of words, which entertained everyone extremely—above all, Meta's indignation when the charge was brought home to her of having declared the 'old Duke' exactly like in turns to Domitian and Tiberius—his features quite forbidding.

This lasted till the younger ones, who had been playing and rioting till they were tired, came up, and throwing themselves down on the grass, Blanche petitioned for something that everyone could play at.

Meta proposed what she called the story play. One was to be sent out of earshot, and the rest to agree upon a word, which was then to be guessed by each telling a story, and introducing the word into it, not too prominently. Meta volunteered to guess, and Harry whispered to Mary it would be no go, but in the meantime, the word was found, and Blanche eagerly recalled Meta, and sat in the utmost expectation and delight. Meta turned first to Richard, but he coloured distressfully, and begged that Flora might tell his story for him—he should only spoil the game. Flora, with a little

tinge of graceful reluctance, obeyed. 'No woman had been to the summit of Mont Blanc,' she said, 'till one young girl, named Marie, resolved to have this glory. The guides told her it was madness, but she persevered. She took the staff, and everything requisite, and, following a party, began the ascent. She bravely supported every fatigue, climbed each precipice, was undaunted by the giddy heights she attained, bravely crossed the fields of snow, supported the bitter cold, and finally, though suffering severely, arrived at the topmost peak, looked forth where woman had never looked before, felt her heart swell at the attainment of her utmost ambition, and the name of Marie was inscribed as that of the woman who alone has had the glory of standing on the summit of the Giant of the Alps.'

It was prettily enunciated, and had a pleasing effect. Meta stood conning the words—woman—giant—mountain—glory—and begged for another tale.

'Mine shall not be so stupid as Flora's,' said Harry. 'We have an old sailor on board the *Alceste*—a giant he might be for his voice—but he sailed once in the *Glory of the West*, and there they had a monkey that was picked up in Africa, and one day this old fellow found his queer messmate, as he called him, spying through a glass, just like the captain. The captain had a glorious collection of old coins, and the like, dug up in some of the old Greek colonies, and whenever Master Monkey saw him overhauling them, he would get out a brass button, or a card or two, and turn 'em over, and chatter at them, and glory over them, quite knowing—' said Harry, imitating the gesture, 'and I dare say he saw V. V., and Tiberius Cæsar, as well as the best of them.'

'Thank you, Mr. Harry,' said Meta. 'I think we are at no loss for monkeys here. But I have not the word yet. Who comes next? Ethel—'

'I shall blunder, I forewarn you,' said Ethel, 'but this is mine. "There was a young king, who had an old tutor, whom he despised because he was so strict, so he got rid of him, and took to idle sport. One day, when he was out hunting in a forest, a white hind came and ran before him, till she guided him to a castle, and there he found a lady, all dressed in white, with a beamy crown on her head, and so nobly beautiful, that he fell in love with her at once, and was only sorry to see another prince who was come to her palace too. She told them her name was Gloria, and that she had had many suitors, but the choice did not depend on herself—she could only be won by him who deserved her, and for three years they were to be on their probation, trying for her. So she dismissed them, only burning to gain her, and telling them to come back in three years' time. But they had not gone far before they saw another palace, much finer, all glittering with gold and silver, and their Lady Gloria came out to meet them, not in her white

dress, but in one all gay and bright with fine colours, and her crown they now saw was of diamonds. She told them they had only seen her every-day dress and house, this was her best; and she showed them about the castle, and all the pictures of her former lovers. There was Alexander, who had been nearer retaining her than anyone, only the fever prevented it; there was Pyrrhus, always seeking her, but slain by a tile—Julius Cæsar—Tamerlane—all the rest, and she hoped that one of these two would really prove worthy and gain her, by going in the same path as these great people.

“So our prince went home; his head full of being like Alexander and all the rest of them, and he sent for his good old tutor to reckon up his armies, and see whom he could conquer in order to win her. But the old tutor told him he was under a mistake; the second lady he had seen was a treacherous cousin of Gloria, who drew away her suitors by her deceits, and whose real name was Vana Gloria. If he wished to earn the true Gloria, he must set to work to do his subjects good, and to be virtuous. And he did; he taught them, and he did justice to them, and he bore it patiently and kindly when they did not understand. But by-and-by, the other king, who had no good tutor to help him, had got his armies together, and conquered ever so many people, and drawn off their men to be soldiers; and now he attacked the good prince, and was so strong, that he gained the victory, though both prince and subjects fought manfully with heart and hand; but the battle was lost, and the faithful prince wounded and made prisoner, but bearing it most patiently, till he was dragged behind the other’s triumphal car with all the rest, when the three years were up, to be presented to Vana Gloria. And so he was carried into the forest, bleeding and wounded, and his enemy drove the car over his body, and stretched out his arms to Vana Gloria, and found her a vain, ugly wretch, who grew frightful as soon as he grasped her. But the good dying prince saw the beautiful beamy face of his lady-love bending over him. ‘Oh!’ he said, ‘vision of my life, hast thou come to lighten my dying eyes? Never—never, even in my best days, did I deem that I could be worthy of thee; the more I strove, the more I knew that Gloria is for none below—for me less than all.’

“And then the lady came and lifted him up, and she said, ‘Gloria is given to all who do and suffer truly in a good cause, for faithfulness is glory, and that is thine.’”

Ethel’s language had become more flowing as she grew more eager in the tale, and they all listened with suspended interest. Norman asked where she got the story. ‘Out of an old French book, the *Magazin des enfans*,’ was the answer.

‘But why did you alter the end?’ said Flora, ‘why kill the poor man? He used to be prosperous, why not?’

‘Because I thought,’ said Ethel, ‘that glory could not properly

belong to anyone here, and if he was once conscious of it, it would be all spoilt. Well, Meta, do you guess ?

‘ Oh ! the word ! I had forgotten all about it. I think I know what it must be, but I should so like another story. May I not have one ? ’ said Meta, coaxingly. ‘ Mary, it is you. ’

Mary fell back on her papa, and begged him to take hers. Papa told the best stories of all, she said, and Meta looked beseeching.

‘ My story will not be as long as Ethel’s, ’ said the Doctor, yielding with a half reluctant smile. ‘ My story is of a humming bird, a little creature that loved its master with all its strength, and longed to do somewhat for him. It was not satisfied with its lot, because it seemed merely a vain and profitless creature. The nightingale sang praise, and the woods sounded with the glory of its strains ; the fowl was valued for its flesh, the ostrich for its plume, but what could the little humming bird do, save rejoice in the glory of the flood of sunbeams, and disport itself over the flowers, and glance in the sunny light, as its bright breastplate flashed from rich purple to dazzling flame colour, and its wings supported it, fluttering so fast that the eye could hardly trace them, as it darted its slender beak into the deep-bellied blossoms. So the little bird grieved, and could not rest, for thinking that it was useless in this world, that it sought merely its own gratification, and could do nothing that could conduce to the glory of its master. But, one night, a voice spoke to the little bird, “ Why hast thou been placed here, ” it said, “ but at the will of thy master ? Was it not that he might delight himself in thy radiant plumage, and see thy joy in the sunshine ? His gifts are thy buoyant wing, thy beauteous colours, the love of all around, the sweetness of the honey drop in the flowers, the shade of the palm leaf. Esteem them, then, as his ; value thine own bliss, while it lasts, as the token of his care and love ; and while thy heart praises him for them, and thy wings quiver and dance to the tune of that praise, then, indeed, thy gladness conduces to no vain-glory of thine own, in beauty, or in graceful flight, but thou art a creature serving as best thou canst to his glory. ” ’

‘ I know the word, ’ half whispered Meta, not without a trembling of the lip. ‘ I know why you told the story, Dr. May, but one is not as good as the humming birds. ’

The elder ladies had begun to look at watches, and talk of time to go home ; and Jem Jennings having been seen rearing himself up from behind the barrow, the Doctor proceeded to investigate his case, was perfectly satisfied of the boy’s truth, and as ready as the young ones to befriend him. A letter should be written at once, desiring his father to look out for him on Friday, when he should go by the same train as Harry, who was delighted at the notion of protecting him so far, and begged to be allowed to drive him home to Stoneborough in the gig.

Consent was given ; and Richard being added to give weight

and discretion, the gig set out at once—the Doctor, much to Meta's delight, took his place in the break. Blanche, who, in the morning, had been inclined to despise it as something akin to a cart, now finding it a popular conveyance, was urgent to return in it; and Flora was made over to the carriage, not at all unwillingly, for, though it separated her from Meta, it made a senior of her.

Norman's fate conveyed him to the exalted seat beside the driver of the break, where he could only now and then catch the sounds of mirth from below. He had enjoyed the day exceedingly, with that sort of *abandon* more than ordinarily delicious to grave or saddened temperaments, when roused or drawn out for a time. Meta's winning grace and sweetness had a peculiar charm for him, and, perhaps, his having been originally introduced to her as ill, and in sorrow, had given her manner towards him a sort of kindness which was very gratifying.

And now he felt as if he was going back to a very dusky dusty world; the last and blithest day of his holidays was past, and he must return to the misapprehensions and injustice that had blighted his school career, be kept beneath boys with half his ability, and without generous feeling, and find all his attainments useless in restoring his position. Dr. Hoxton's dull scholarship would chill all pleasure in his studies—there would be no companionship among the boys—even his supporters, Ernescliffe and Larkins, were gone, and Harry would leave him still under a cloud.

Norman felt it more as disgrace than he had done since the first, and wished he had consented to quit the school when it had been offered—he made a man, instead of suffering these doubly irksome provocations, which rose before him in renewed force. 'And what would that little humming bird think of me if she knew me disgraced?' thought he. 'But it is of no use to think of it. I must go through with it, and as I always *am* getting vain-glorious, I had better have no opportunity. I did not declare I renounced vain-pomp and glory last week, to begin coveting them now again.'

So Norman repressed the sigh as he looked at the school-buildings, which never could give him the pleasures of memory they afforded to others.

The break had set out before the carriage, so that Meta had to come in and wait for her governess. Before the vehicle had disgorged half its contents, Harry had rushed out to meet them. 'Come in! come in, Norman! Only hear. Margaret shall tell you herself! Hurra!'

Is Mr. Ernescliffe come? crossed Ethel's mind, but Margaret was alone, flushed, and holding out her hands. 'Norman! where is he? Dear Norman, here is good news! Papa, Dr. Hoxton has been here, and he knows all about it—and oh! Norman, he is very sorry for the injustice, and you are Dux again!'

Norman really trembled so much that he could neither speak

nor stand, but sat down on the window-seat, while a confusion of tongues asked more.

Dr. Hoxton and Mr. Larkins had come to call—heard no one was at home but Miss May—had, nevertheless, come in—and Margaret had heard that Mr. Larkins, who had before intended to remove his son from Stoneborough, had, in the course of the holidays, made discoveries from him, which he could not feel justified in concealing from Dr. Hoxton.

The whole of the transactions with Ballhatchet, and Norman's part in them, had been explained, as well as the true history of the affray in Randall's alley—how Norman had dispersed the boys, how they had again collected, and, with the full concurrence of Harvey Anderson, renewed the mischief, how the Andersons had refused to bear witness in his favour, and how Ballhatchet's ill-will had kept back the evidence which would have cleared him.

Little Larkins had told all, and his father had no scruple in repeating it, and causing the investigation to be set on foot. Nay, he deemed that Norman's influence had saved his son, and came, as anxious to thank him, as Dr. Hoxton, warm-hearted, though injudicious, was to repair his injustice. They were much surprised and struck by finding that Dr. May had been aware of the truth the whole time, and had patiently put up with the injustice, and the loss of the scholarship—a loss which Dr. Hoxton would have given anything to repair, so as to have sent up a scholar likely to do him so much credit; but it was now too late, and he had only been able to tell Margaret how dismayed he was at finding out that the boy to whom all the good order in his school was owing, had been so ill-used. Kind Dr. May's first feeling really seemed to be pity and sympathy for his old friend, the head master, in the shock of such a discovery. Harry was vociferously telling his version of the story to Ethel and Mary. Tom stood transfixed in attention. Meta, forgotten and bewildered, was standing near Norman, whose colour rapidly varied, and whose breath came short and quick as he listened. A quick half interrogation passed Meta's lips, heard by no one else.

'It is only that it is all right,' he answered, scarcely audibly; 'they have found out the truth.'

'What—who—you?' said Meta, as she heard words that implied the past suspicion.

'Yes,' said Norman, 'I was suspected, but never at home.'

'And is it over now?'

'Yes, yes,' he whispered huskily, 'all is right, and Harry will not leave me in disgrace.'

Meta did not speak, but she held out her hand in hearty congratulation; Norman, scarce knowing what he did, grasped and wrung it so tight, that it was positive pain, as he turned away his head to the window to struggle with those irrepressible tears. Meta's colour flushed into her cheek as she found it still held, almost

unconsciously perhaps, in his agitation, and she heard Margaret's words, that both gentlemen had said Norman had acted nobly, and that every revelation made in the course of their examination, had only more fully established his admirable conduct.

'O Norman! Norman, I am so glad!' cried Mary's voice in the first pause, and, Margaret asking where he was, he suddenly turned round, recollected himself, and found it was not the back of the chair that he had been squeezing, blushed intensely, but made no attempt at apology, for indeed he could not speak—he only leant down over Margaret, to receive her heartfelt embrace; and, as he stood up again, his father laid his hand on his shoulder, 'My boy, I am glad—' but the words were broken, and, as if neither could bear more, Norman hastily left the room, Ethel rushing after him.

'Quite overcome!' said the Doctor, 'and no wonder. He felt it cruelly, though he bore up gallantly. Well, July.'

'I'll go down to school with him to-morrow, and see him Dux again! I'll have three-times-three!' shouted Harry, 'hip! hip! hurra!' and Tom and Mary joined in chorus.

'What is all this?' exclaimed Flora, opening the door—is everyone gone mad?'

Many were the voices that answered.

'Well! I am glad, and I hope the Andersons will make an apology. But where is poor Meta? Quite forgotten?'

'Meta would not wonder if she knew all,' said the Doctor, turning, with a sweet smile that had in it something nevertheless of apology

'Oh! I am so glad—so glad!' said Meta, her eyes full of tears as she came forward.

And there was no helping it; the first kiss between Margaret May, and Margaret Rivers, was given in that overflowing sympathy of congratulation.

The Doctor gave her his arm to take her to the carriage, and, on the way, his quick warm words filled up the sketch of Norman's behaviour; Meta's eyes responded better than her tongue, but, to her good-bye, she could not help adding, 'Now I *have* seen true glory.'

His answer was much such a gripe as her poor little fingers had already received, but though they felt hot and crushed, all the way home, the sensation seemed to cause such throbs of joy, that she would not have been without it.

CHAPTER XXVII

'And full of hope, day followed day,
 While that stout ship at anchor lay
 Beside the shores of Wight
 The May had then made all things green,
 And floating there, in pomp serene,
 That ship was goodly to be seen,
 His pride and his delight.

Yet then when called ashore, he sought
 The tender peace of rural thought,
 In more than happy mood.
 To your abodes, bright daisy flowers,
 He then would steal at leisure hours,
 And loved you, glittering in your bowers,
 A starry multitude.'

WORDSWORTH.

HARRY's last home morning was brightened by going to the school to see full justice done to Norman, and enjoying the scene for him. It was indeed a painful ordeal to Norman himself, who could, at the moment, scarcely feel pleasure in his restoration, excepting for the sake of his father, Harry, and his sisters. To find the head master making apologies to him, was positively painful and embarrassing, and his countenance would have been fitter for a culprit receiving a lecture. It was pleasanter when the two other masters shook hands with him, Mr. Harrison with a free confession that he had done him injustice, and Mr. Wilmot with a glad look of congratulation, that convinced Harry he had never believed Norman to blame.

Harry himself was somewhat of a hero; the masters all spoke to him, bade him good speed, and wished him a happy voyage, and all the boys were eager to admire his uniform, and wish themselves already men and officers like Mr. May. He had his long-desired three cheers for 'May Senior!' shouted with a thorough good-will by the united lungs of the Whiccheote foundation, and a supplementary cheer arose for the good ship *Alcestis*, while hands were held out on every side; and the boy arrived at such a pitch of benevolence and good-humour, as actually to volunteer a friendly shake of the hand to Edward Anderson, whom he encountered skulking apart.

'Never mind, Ned, we have often licked each other before now, and don't let us bear a grudge now I am going away. We are Stoneborough fellows both, you know, after all.'

Edward did not refuse the offered grasp, and though his words were only, 'Good-bye, I hope you will have plenty of fun!' Harry went away with a lighter heart.

The rest of the day Harry adhered closely to his father, though chiefly in silence; Dr. May had intended much advice and exhortation for his warm-hearted, wild-spirited son, but words would not come, not even when in the still evening twilight they walked down alone together to the cloister, and stood over the little stone marked

M. M. After standing there for some minutes, Harry knelt to collect some of the daisies in the grass.

‘Are those to take with you?’

‘Margaret is going to make a Cross of them for my Prayer-book.’

‘Aye, they will keep it in your mind—say it all to you, Harry. She may be nearer to you everywhere, though you are far from us. Don’t put yourself from her.’

That was all Dr. May contrived to say to his son, nor could Margaret do much more than kiss him, while tears flowed one by one over her cheeks, as she tried to whisper that he must remember and guard himself, and that he was sure of being thought of, at least, in every prayer; and then she fastened into his book the Cross formed of flattened daisies, gummed upon a framework of paper. He begged her to place it at the Baptismal Service, for he said, ‘I like that about fighting—and I always did like the Church being like a ship—don’t you? I only found that prayer out the day poor little Daisy was Christened.’

Margaret had indeed a thrill of melancholy pleasure in this task, when she saw how it was regarded. Oh! that her boy might not lose these impressions amid the stormy waves he was about to encounter.

That last evening of home good nights cost Harry many a choking sob ere he could fall asleep; but the morning of departure had more cheerfulness; the pleasure of patronizing Jem Jennings was as consoling to his spirits, as was to Mary the necessity of comforting Toby.

Toby’s tastes were in some respects vulgar, as he preferred the stable, and Will Adams, to all Mary’s attentions; but he attached himself vehemently to Dr. May, followed him everywhere, and went into raptures at the slightest notice from him. The Doctor said it was all homage to the master of the house. Margaret held that the dog was a physiognomist.

The world was somewhat flat after the loss of Harry—that element of riot and fun—Aubrey was always playing at ‘poor Harry sailing away,’ Mary looked staid and sober, and Norman was still graver, and more devoted to books, while Ethel gave herself up more completely to the thickening troubles of Cocksmoor.

Jealousies had arisen there, and these, with some rebukes for failures in sending children to be taught, had led to imputations on the character of Mrs. Green, in whose house the school was kept. Ethel was at first vehement in her defence; then when stronger evidence was adduced of the woman’s dishonesty, she was dreadfully shocked, and wanted to give up all connexion with her, and in both moods was equally displeased with Richard for pausing, and not going all lengths with her.

Mr. Wilmot was appealed to, and did his best to investigate, but

the only result was, to discover that no one interrogated, had any notion of truth, except John Taylor, and he knew nothing of the matter. The mass of falsehood, spite, violence, and dishonesty, that became evident, was perfectly appalling, and not a clue was to be found to the truth—scarcely a hope that minds so lost to honourable feeling were open to receive good impressions. It was a great distress to Ethel—it haunted her night and day—she lay awake pondering on the vain hopes for her poor children, and slept to dream of the angry faces and rude accusations. Margaret grew quite anxious about her, and her elders were seriously considering the propriety of her continuing her labours at Cocksmoor.

Mr. Wilmot would not be at Stoneborough after Christmas. His father's declining health made him be required at home, and since Richard was so often absent, it became matter of doubt whether the Miss Mays ought to be allowed to persevere, unassisted by older heads, in such a locality.

This doubt put Ethel into an agony. Though she had lately been declaring that it made her very unhappy to go—she could not bear the sight of Mrs. Green, and that she knew all her efforts were vain while the poor children had such homes; she now only implored to be allowed to go on; she said that the badness of the people only made it more needful to do their utmost for them—there was no end to the arguments that she poured forth upon her ever kind listener, Margaret.

'Yes, dear Ethel, yes, but pray be calm; I know papa and Mr. Wilmot would not put a stop to it, if they could possibly help it, but if it is not proper—'

'Proper! that is as bad as Miss Winter!'

'Ethel, you and I cannot judge of these things—you must leave them to our elders—'

'And men always are so fanciful about ladies—'

'Indeed, if you speak in that way, I shall think it is really hurting you.'

'I did not mean it, dear Margaret,' said Ethel, 'but if you knew what I feel for poor Cocksmoor, you would not wonder that I cannot bear it.'

'I do not wonder, dearest, but if this trial is sent you, perhaps it is to train you for better things.'

'Perhaps it is for my fault,' said Ethel. 'Oh! oh! if it be that I am too unworthy. And it is the only hope; no one will do anything to teach these poor creatures, if I give it up. What shall I do, Margaret?'

Margaret drew her down close to her, and whispered, 'Trust them, Ethel dear. The decision will be whatever is the will of God. If he thinks fit to give you the work, it will come; if not, He will give you some other, and provide for them.'

'If I have been too neglectful of home, too vain of persevering when no one but Richard would,' sighed Ethel.

'I cannot see that you have, dearest,' said Margaret, fondly, 'but your own heart must tell you that. And now, only try to be calm and patient. Getting into these fits of despair is the very thing to make people decide against you.'

'I will! I will! I will try to be patient,' sobbed Ethel; 'I know to be wayward and set on it would only hurt. I might only do more harm—I'll try. But oh! my poor children.'

Margaret gave a little space for the struggle with herself, then advised her resolutely to fix her attention on something else. It was a Saturday morning, and time was more free than usual, so Margaret was able to persuade her to continue a half-forgotten drawing, while listening to an interesting article in a review, which opened to her that there were too many Cocksmoors in the world.

The dinner hour sounded too soon, and, as she was crossing the hall, to put away her drawing materials, the front door gave the click peculiar to Dr. May's left-handed way of opening it. She paused, and saw him enter, flushed, and with a look that certified her that something had happened.

'Well, Ethel! he is come.'

'Oh papa! Mr. Ernes—'

He held up his finger, drew her into the study, and shut the door. The expression of mystery and amusement gave way to sadness and gravity as he sat down in his arm-chair, and sighed as if much fatigued. She was checked and alarmed, but she could not help asking, 'Is he here?'

'At the Swan. He came last night, and watched for me this morning, as I came out of the hospital. We have been walking over the meadows to Fordholm.'

No wonder Dr. May was hot and tired.

'But is he not coming?' asked Ethel.

'Yes, poor fellow; but hush, stop, say nothing to the others. I must not have her agitated till she has had her dinner in peace, and the house is quiet. You know she cannot run away to her room as you would.'

'Then he is really come for *that*?' cried Ethel, breathlessly; and, perceiving the affirmative, added, 'but why did he wait so long?'

'He wished to see his way through his affairs, and also wanted to hear of her from Harry. I am afraid poor July's colours were too bright.'

'And why did he come to the Swan instead of to us?'

'That was his fine, noble feeling. He thought it right to see me first, that if I thought the decision too trying for Margaret, in her present state, or if I disapproved of the long engagement, I might spare her all knowledge of his coming.'

'Oh papa! you won't!'

'I don't know but that I ought—but yet—the fact is, that I cannot. With that fine young fellow so generously, fondly attached, I cannot find it in my heart to send him away for four years without seeing her, and yet, poor things, it might be better for them both. O Ethel, if your mother were but here!'

He rested his forehead on his hands, and Ethel stood aghast at his unexpected reception of the addresses for which she had so long hoped. She did not venture to speak, and presently he roused himself as the dinner-bell rang. 'One comfort is,' he said, 'that Margaret has more composure than I. Do you go to Cocksmoor this afternoon?'

'I wished it.'

'Take them all with you. You may tell them why when you are out. I must have the house quiet. I shall get Margaret out into the shade, and prepare her, as best I can, before he comes at three o'clock.'

It was flattering not to be thus cleared out of the way, especially when full of excited curiosity, but any such sensation was quite overborne by sympathy in his great anxiety, and Ethel's only question was, 'Had not Flora better stay, to keep off company?'

'No, no,' said Dr. May, impatiently, 'the fewer the better:' and hastily passing her, he dashed up to his room, nearly running over the nursery procession, and, in a very few seconds, was seated at table, eating and speaking by snatches, and swallowing endless draughts of cold water.

'You are going to Cocksmoor!' said he, as they were finishing.

'It is the right day,' said Richard. 'Are you coming, Flora?'

'Not to-day, I have to call on Mrs. Hoxton.'

'Never mind Mrs. Hoxton,' said the Doctor—'you had better go to-day, a fine cool day for a walk.'

He did not look as if he had found it so.

'O yes, Flora, you must come,' said Ethel, 'we want you.'

'I have engagements at home,' replied Flora.

'And it really is a trying walk,' said Miss Winter.

'You must,' reiterated Ethel. 'Come to our room and I will tell you why.'

'I do not mean to go to Cocksmoor till something positive is settled. I cannot have anything to do with that woman.'

'If you would only come up-stairs,' implored Ethel, at the door. 'I have something to tell you alone.'

'I shall come up in due time. I thought you had outgrown closetings, and foolish secrets,' said Flora.

Her movements were quickened however by her father, who, finding her with Margaret in the drawing-room, ordered her up-stairs in a peremptory manner, which she resented, as treating her like a child, and therefore proceeded in no amiable mood to the room, where Ethel awaited her in wild tumultuous impatience.

‘ Well, Ethel, what is this grand secret ? ’

‘ O Flora ! Mr. Ernescliffe is at the Swan ! He has been speaking to papa about Margaret.’

‘ Proposing for her, do you mean ? ’ said Flora.

‘ Yes, he is coming to see her this afternoon, and that is the reason that papa wants us to be all out of the way.’

‘ Did papa tell you this ? ’

‘ Yes,’ said Ethel, beginning to perceive the secret of her displeasure, ‘ but only because I was the first person he met ; and Norman guessed it long ago. Do put on your things ! I’ll tell you all I know when we are out. Papa is so anxious to have the coast clear.’

‘ I understand,’ said Flora, ‘ but I shall not go with you. Do not be afraid of my interfering with anyone. I shall sit here.’

‘ But papa said you were to go.’

If he had done me the favour of speaking to me himself,’ said Flora, ‘ I should have shown him that it is not right that Margaret should be left without anyone at hand in case she should be overcome. He is of no use in such cases, only makes things worse. I should not feel justified in leaving Margaret with no one else ; but he is one of those hand-over-head moods, when it is not of the least use to say a word to him.’

‘ Flora ! how can you ? when he expressly ordered you.’

‘ All he meant was, do not be in the way, and I shall not show myself unless I am needed, when he would be glad enough of me. I am not bound to obey the very letter, like Blanche or Mary.’

Ethel looked horrified by the assertion of independence, but Richard called her from below, and with one more fruitless entreaty she ran down stairs.

Richard had been hearing all from his father, and it was comfortable to talk the matter over with him, and hear explained the anxiety which frightened her, while she scarcely comprehended it ; how Dr. May could not feel certain whether it was right or expedient to promote an engagement which must depend on health so uncertain as poor Margaret’s, and how he dreaded the effect on the happiness of both.

Ethel’s romance seemed to be turning to melancholy, and she walked on gravely and thoughtfully, though repeating that there would be no doubt of Margaret’s perfect recovery by the time of the return from the voyage.

Her lessons were somewhat nervous and flurried, and even the sight of two very nice neat new scholars, of very different appearance from the rest, and of much superior attainments, only half interested her. Mary was enchanted at them as a pair of prodigies, actually able to read ! and had made out their names, and their former abodes, and how they had been used to go to school, and had just come to live in the cottage deserted by the lamented Una.

Ethel thought it quite provoking in her brother to accede to Mary's entreaties that they should go and call on this promising importation. Even the children's information that they were taught now by 'Sister Cherry' failed to attract her; but Richard looked at his watch, and decided that it was too soon to go home, and she had to submit to her fate.

Very different was the aspect of the house from the wild Irish cabin appearance that it had had in the M'Carthy days. It was the remains of an old farm-house that had seen better days, somewhat larger than the general run of the Cocks Moor dwellings. Respectable furniture had taken up its abode against the walls, the kitchen was well arranged, and, in spite of the wretched flooring and broken windows, had an air of comfort. A very tidy woman was bustling about, still trying to get rid of the relics of her former tenants, who might, she much feared, have left a legacy of typhus fever. The more interesting person was, however, a young woman of three or four-and-twenty, pale, and very lame, and with the air of a respectable servant, her manners particularly pleasing. It appeared that she was the daughter of a first wife, and, after the period of schooling, had been at service, but had been lamed by a fall down-stairs, and had been obliged to come home, just as scarcity of work had caused her father to leave his native parish, and seek employment at other quarries. She had hoped to obtain plain work, but all the family were dismayed and disappointed at the wild spot to which they had come, and anxiously availed themselves of this introduction to beg that the elder boy and girl might be admitted into the town school, distant as it was. At another time, the thought of Charity Elwood would have engrossed Ethel's whole mind, now she could hardly attend, and kept looking eagerly at Richard as he talked endlessly with the good mother. When, at last, they did set off, he would not let her gallop home like a steam-engine, but made her take his arm, when he found that she could not otherwise moderate her steps. At the long hill, a figure appeared, and, as soon as Richard was certified of its identity, he let her fly, like a bolt from a cross-bow, and she stood by Dr. May's side.

A little ashamed, she blushed instead of speaking and waited for Richard to come up and begin. Neither did he say anything, and they paused till, the silence disturbing her, she ventured a 'Well, papa!'

'Well, poor things. She was quite overcome when first I told her—said it would be hard on him, and begged me to tell him that he would be much happier if he thought no more of her.'

'Did Margaret?' cried Ethel. 'Oh! could she mean it?'

'She thought she meant it, poor dear, and repeated such things again and again; but when I asked whether I should send him away without seeing her, she cried more than ever and said, 'You are tempting me! It would be selfishness.'

‘O dear! she surely has seen him!’

‘I told her that I would be the last person to wish to tempt her to selfishness, but that I did not think that either could be easy in settling such a matter through a third person.’

‘It would have been very unkind, said Ethel; ‘I wonder she did not think so.’

‘She did at last. I saw it could not be otherwise, and she said, poor darling, that when he had seen her, he would know the impossibility; but she was so agitated, that I did not know how it could be.’

‘Has she?’

‘Aye, I told him not to stay too long, and left him under the tulip-tree with her. I found her much more composed—he was so gentle and considerate. Ah! he is the very man! Besides, he has convinced her now that affection brings him, not mere generosity, as she fancied.’

‘O, then, it is settled!’ cried Ethel, joyously.

‘I wish it were! She has owned that if—if she were in health—but that is all, and he is transported with having gained so much! Poor fellow. So far, I trust, it is better for them to know each other’s minds, but how it is to be—’

‘But, papa, you know Sir Matthew Fleet said she was sure to get well! and in three years’ time’—

‘Yes! yes, that is the best chance. But it is a dreary look out for two young things. That is in wiser hands, however! If only I saw what was right to do! My miserable carelessness has undone you all!’ he concluded, almost inaudibly.

It was, indeed, to him a time of great distress and perplexity, wishing to act the part of father and mother both towards his daughter, acutely feeling his want of calm decision, and torn to pieces at once by sympathy with the lovers, and by delicacy that held him back from seeming to bind the young man to an uncertain engagement,—above all, tortured by self-reproach for the commencement of the attachment, and for the misfortune that had rendered its prosperity doubtful.

Ethel could find no words of comfort in the bewildered glimpse at his sorrow and agitation. Richard spoke with calmness and good sense, and his replies, though brief and common-place, were not without effect in lessening the excitement and despondency which the poor Doctor’s present mood had been aggravating.

At the door, Dr. May asked for Flora, and Ethel explained. If Flora had obtruded herself, he would have been irritated, but, as it was, he had no time to observe the disobedience, and saying that he hoped she was with Margaret, sent Ethel into the drawing-room.

Flora was not there, only Margaret lay on her sofa, and Ethel hesitated, shy, curious, and alarmed; but, as she approached, she was relieved to see the blue eyes more serene even than usual, while

a glow of colour spread over her face, making her like the blooming Margaret of old times; her expression was full of peace, but became somewhat amused at Ethel's timid, awkward pauses, as she held out her hands, and said, 'Come, dear Ethel.'

'O, Margaret, Margaret!'

And Ethel was drawn into her sister's bosom. Presently, she drew back, gazed at her sister inquiringly, and said in an odd, doubtful voice, 'Then you are glad?'

Margaret nearly laughed at the strange manner, but spoke with a sorrowful tone, 'Glad in one way, dearest, almost too glad, and grateful.'

'O, I am so glad!' again said Ethel; 'I thought it was making everybody unhappy.'

'I don't believe I could be that, now he has come, now I know;' and her voice trembled. 'There must be doubt and uncertainty,' she added, 'but I cannot dwell on them just yet. They will settle what is right, I know, and, happen what may, I have always *this* to remember.'

'Oh! that is right! Papa will be so relieved! He was afraid it had only been distress.'

'Poor papa! Yes, I did not command myself at first; I was not sure whether it was right to see him at all.'

'Oh! Margaret, that was too bad!'

'It did not seem right to encourage any such—such,' the word was lost, 'to such a poor helpless thing as I am. I did not know what to do, and I am afraid I behaved like a silly child, and did not think of dear papa's feelings. But I will try to be good, and leave it all to them.'

'And you are going to be happy?' said Ethel, wistfully.

'For the present, at least. I cannot help it,' said Margaret. 'Oh! he is so kind, and so unselfish, and so beautifully gentle—and to think of his still caring—but there, dear Ethel, I am not going to cry—do call papa, or he will think me foolish again. I want him to be quite at ease about me before he comes.'

'Then he is coming?'

'Yes, at tea-time—so run, dear Ethel, and tell Jane to get his room ready.'

This message quickened Ethel, and after giving it, and reporting consolingly to her father, she went up to Flora, who had been a voluntary prisoner up-stairs all this time, and was not peculiarly gratified at such tidings coming only through the medium of Ethel. She had before been sensible that, superior in discretion and effectiveness as she was acknowledged to be, she did not share so much of the confidence and sympathy as some of the others, and she felt mortified and injured, though in this case it was entirely her own fault. The sense of alienation grew upon her.

She dressed quickly, and hurried down, that she might see

Margaret alone, but the room was already prepared for tea, and the children were fast assembling. Ethel came down a few minutes after, and found Blanche claiming Alan Ernescliffe as her lawful property, dancing round him, chattering, and looking injured if he addressed a word to anyone else.

‘How did lovers look?’ was a speculation which had, more than once, occupied Ethel, and when she had satisfied herself that her father was at ease, she began to study it, as soon as a shamefaced consciousness would allow her, after Alan’s warm shake of the hand.

Margaret looked much as usual, only with more glow and brightness—Mr. Ernescliffe, not far otherwise; he was as pale and slight as on his last visit, with the same soft blue eyes, capable, however, of a peculiar keen, steady glance when he was listening, and which now seemed to be attending to Margaret’s every word or look, through all the delighted uproar which Aubrey, Blanche, and Mary kept up round him, or while taking his share in the general conversation, telling of Harry’s popularity and good conduct on board the *Alcestis*, or listening to the history of Norman’s school adventures, which he had heard, in part, from Harry, and how young Jennings was entered in the flag-ship, as a boy, though not yet to sail with his father.

After the storm of the day, the sky seemed quite clear, and Ethel could not see that being lovers made much difference—to be sure papa displeased Blanche, by calling her away to his side, when she would squeeze her chair in between Alan’s and the sofa; and Alan took all the waiting on Margaret exclusively to himself. Otherwise, there was nothing remarkable, and he was very much the same Mr. Ernescliffe whom they had received a year ago.

In truth, the next ten days were very happy. The future was left to rest, and Alan spent his mornings in the drawing-room alone with Margaret, and looked ever more brightly placid, while, with the rest, he was more than the former kind play-fellow, for he now took his place as the affectionate elder brother, entering warmly into all their schemes and pleasures, and winning for himself a full measure of affection from all; even his little god-daughter began to know him, and smile at his presence. Margaret and Ethel especially delighted in the look of enjoyment with which their father sat down to enter on the evening’s conversation after the day’s work; and Flora was well-pleased that Mrs. Hoxton should find Alan in the drawing-room, and ask afterwards about his estate; and that Meta Rivers, after being certified that this was *their* Mr. Ernescliffe, pronounced that her papa thought him particularly pleasing and gentlemanlike. There was something dignified in having a sister on the point of being engaged.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

'Sail forth into the sea, thou ship,
Through breeze and cloud, right onward steer;
The moistened eye, the trembling lip,
Are not the signs of doubt or fear!'

LONGFELLOW.

TRANQUILLITY only lasted until Mr. Earncliffe found it necessary to understand on what terms he was to stand. Everyone was tender of conscience, anxious to do right, and desirous to yield to the opinion that nobody could, or would give. While Alan begged for a positive engagement, Margaret scrupled to exchange promises that she might never be able to fulfil, and both agreed to leave all to her father, who, in every way, ought to have the best ability to judge whether there was unreasonable presumption in such a betrothal; but this very ability only served to perplex the poor Doctor more and more. It is far easier for a man to decide when he sees only one bearing of a case, than when, like Dr. May, he not only sees them, but is rent by them in his inmost heart. Sympathizing in turn with each lover, bitterly accusing his own carelessness as the cause of all their troubles, his doubts contending with his hopes, his conviction clashing with Sir Matthew Fleet's opinion, his conscientious sincerity and delicacy conflicting with his affection and eagerness, he was perfectly incapable of coming to a decision, and suffered so cruelly, that Margaret was doubly distressed for his sake, and Alan felt himself guilty of having rendered everybody miserable.

Dr. May could not conceal his trouble, and rendered Ethel almost as unhappy as himself, after each conversation with her, though her hopes usually sprang up again, and she had a happy conviction that this was only the second volume of the novel. Flora was not often called into his councils; confidence never came spontaneously from Dr. May to her; there was something that did not draw it forth towards her, whether it resided in that half-sarcastic corner of her steady blue eye, or in the grave common sense of her gentle voice. Her view of the case was known to be that there was no need for so much perplexity—why should not Alan be the best judge of his own happiness? If Margaret were to be delicate for life, it would be better to have such a home to look to; and she soothed and comforted Margaret, and talked in a strain of unmixed hope and anticipation that often drew a smile from her sister, though she feared to trust to it.

Flora's tact and consideration in keeping the children away, when the lovers could best be alone, and letting them in, when the discussion was becoming useless and harassing, her cheerful smiles, her evening music that covered all sounds, her removal of all extra

annoyances, were invaluable, and Margaret appreciated them as, indeed, Flora took care that she should.

Margaret begged to know her eldest brother's judgment, but had great difficulty in dragging it out. Diffidently as it was proposed, it was clear and decided. He thought that his father had better send Sir Matthew Fleet a statement of Margaret's present condition, and abide by his answer as to whether her progress warranted the hope of her restoration.

Never was Richard more surprised than by the gratitude with which his suggestion was hailed, simple as it was, so that it seemed obvious that others should have already thought of it. After the tossings of uncertainty, it was a positive relief to refer the question to some external voice, and only Ethel and Norman expressed strong dislike to Sir Matthew becoming the arbiter of Margaret's fate, and were scarcely pacified by Dr. May's assurance, that he had not revealed the occasion of his inquiry. The letter was sent, and repose returned, but hearts beat high on the morning when the answer was expected.

Dr. May watched the moment when his daughter was alone, carried the letter to her, and kissing her, said, with an oppressed voice, 'I give you joy, my dear.'

She read with suspended breath and palpitating heart. Sir Matthew thought her improvement sure, though slow, and had barely a doubt, that, in a year, she would have regained her full strength and activity.

'You will show it to Alan,' said Dr. May, as Margaret lifted her eyes to his face inquiringly.

'Will not you?' she said.

'I cannot,' he answered. 'I wish I was more helpful to you, my child,' he added, wistfully, 'but you will rest on him, and be happy together while he stays, will you not?'

'Indeed I will, dear papa.'

Mr. Ernescliffe was with her as the Doctor quitted her. She held the letter to him, 'But,' she said, slowly, 'I see that papa does not believe it.'

'You promised to abide by it!' he exclaimed, between entreaty and authority.

'I do; if you choose so to risk your hopes.'

'But,' cried he, as he glanced hastily over the letter, 'there can be no doubt! These words are as certain as language can make them. Why will you not trust them?'

'I see that papa does not.'

'Despondency and self-reproach make him morbidly anxious. Believe so, my Margaret! You know he is no surgeon!'

'His education included that line,' said Margaret. 'I believe he has all but the manual dexterity. However, I would fain have

faith in Sir Matthew,' she added, smiling, 'and perhaps I am only swayed by the habit of thinking that papa must know best.'

'He does in indifferent cases; but it is an old axiom, that a medical man should not prescribe for his own family; above all, in such a case, where it is but reasonable to believe an unprejudiced stranger, who alone is cool enough to be relied on. I absolutely depend on him!'

Margaret absolutely depended on the bright cheerful look of conviction. 'Yes, she said, 'we will try to make papa take pleasure in the prospect. Perhaps I could do more if I made the attempt.'

'I am sure you could, if you would let me give you more support. If I were but going to remain with you!'

'Don't let us be discontented,' said Margaret, smiling, 'when so much more has been granted than I dare to hope. Be it as it may, let us be happy in what we have.'

'It makes you happy?' said he, archly reading her face to draw out the avowal, but he only made her hide it, with a mute caress of the hand that held hers. She was glad enough to rest in the present, now that everything concurred to satisfy her conscience in so doing, and come what might, the days now spent together would be a possession of joy for ever.

Captain Gordon contrived to afford his lieutenant another fortnight's leave, perhaps because he was in dread of losing him altogether, for Alan had some doubts, and many longings to remain. Had it been possible to marry at once, he would have quitted the navy immediately; and he would have given worlds to linger beside Margaret's couch, and claim her the first moment possible, believing his care more availing than all. He was, however, so pledged to Captain Gordon, that, without strong cause, he would not have been justified in withdrawing; besides, Harry was under his charge, and Dr. May and Margaret both thought, with the captain, that an active life would be a better occupation for him than watching her. He would never be able to settle down at his new home comfortably without her, and he would be more in the way of duty while pursuing his profession, so Margaret nerved herself against using her influence to detain him, and he thanked her for it.

Though hope and affection could not at once repair an injured spine, they had wonderful powers in inciting Margaret to new efforts. Alan was as tender and ready of hand as Richard, and more clever and enterprising; and her unflinching trust in him prevented all alarms and misgivings, so that wonders were effected, and her father beheld her standing with so little support, looking so healthful, and so blithe, that his forebodings melted away, and he talked joyously of the future.

The great achievement was taking her round the garden. She could not bear the motion of wheels, but Alan adopted the hammock principle, and, with the aid of Richard and his crosby, the

carpenter, produced a machine in which no other power on earth could have prevailed on her to trust herself, but in which she was carried round the garden so successfully, that there was even a talk of next Sunday, and of the minister.

It was safely accomplished, and tired as she was, Margaret felt, as she whispered to Alan, that he had now crowned all the joy that he had brought to her.

Ethel used to watch them, and think how beautiful their countenances were, and talk them over with her father, who was quite happy about them now. She gave assistance, which Alan never once called unhandy, to all his contrivances, and often floundered in upon his conferences with Margaret, in a way that would have been very provoking, if she had not always blushed and looked so excessively discomfited, that they had only to laugh and reassure her.

Alan was struck by finding that the casual words spoken on the way from Cocksmoor had been so strenuously acted on, and he brought on himself a whole torrent of Ethel's confused narratives, which Richard and Flora would fain have checked; but Margaret let them continue, as she saw him a willing listener, and was grateful to him for comprehending the ardent girl.

He declared himself to have a share in the matter, reminding Ethel of her appeal to him to bind himself to the service of Cocksmoor. He sent a sovereign at once, to aid in a case of the sudden death of a pig; and when securely established in his brotherly right, he begged Ethel to let him know what would help her most. She stood colouring, twisting her hands, and wondering what to say, whereupon he relieved her by a proposal to leave an order for ten pounds, to be yearly paid into her hands, as a fixed income for her school.

A thousand a year could hardly have been so much to Ethel. 'Thank you! Oh, this is charming! We could set up a regular school! Cherry Elwood is the very woman! Alan, you have made our fortune! Oh, Margaret! Margaret! I must go and tell Ritchie and Mary?' This is the first real step to our Church and all!

'May I do it?' said Alan, turning to Margaret, as Ethel frantically burst out of the room; 'perhaps I should have asked leave?'

'I was going to thank you,' said Margaret. 'It is the very kindest thing you could have done by dear Ethel! the greatest comfort to us. She will be at peace now, when anything hinders her from going to Cocksmoor'

'I wonder,' said Alan, musing, 'whether we shall ever be able to help her more substantially. I cannot do anything hastily, for you know Maplewood is still in the hands of the executors, and I cannot tell what claims there may be upon me; but by-and-by, when I return, if I find no other pressing duty, might not a Church at Cocksmoor be a thank offering for all I have found here?'

‘Oh! Alan, what joy it would be!’

‘It is a long way off,’ he said sadly; ‘and perhaps her force of perseverance will have prevailed alone.’

‘I suppose I must not tell her, even as a vision.’

‘It is too uncertain; I do not know the wants of the Maplewood people, and I must provide for Hector. I would not let these vague dreams interfere with her resolute work; but, Margaret, what a vision it is! I can see you laying the first stone on that fine healthy brow.’

‘Oh! your godchild should lay the first stone!’

‘She shall, and you shall lead her. And there shall be Ethel’s sharp face full of indescribable things as she marshals her children, and Richard shall be Curate, and read in his steady soft tone, and your father shall look sunny with his boys around him, and you—’

‘Oh! Alan!’ said Margaret, who had been listening with a smile, ‘it is, indeed, a long way off!’

‘I shall look to it as the haven where I would be,’ said the sailor.

They often spoke together of this scheme, ever decking it in brighter colours. The topic seemed to suit them better than their own future, for there was no dwelling on that without an occasional misgiving, and the more glad the anticipation, the deeper the sigh that followed on Margaret’s part, till Mr. Ernescliffe followed her lead, and they seldom spoke of these uncertainties, but outwardly smiled over the present, inwardly dwelt on the truly certain hopes. There were readings shared together, made more precious than all, by the conversations that ensued.

The hour for parting came at last. Ethel never knew what passed in the drawing-room, whence every one was carefully excluded. Dr. May wandered about, keeping guard over the door, and watching the clock, till, at the last moment, he knocked, and called in a trembling voice, ‘Ernescliffe! Alan! It is past the quarter! You must not stay!’

The other farewells were hurried; Alan seemed voiceless, only nodding in reply to Mary’s vociferous messages to Harry, and huskily whispering to Ethel, ‘Good luck to Cocksmoor.’

The next moment the door had shut on him, and Dr. May and Flora had gone to her sister, whom she found not tearful, but begging to be left alone.

When they saw her again, she was cheerful; she kept up her composure and animation without flagging, nor did she discontinue her new exertions, but seemed decidedly the happier for all that had passed.

Letters came every day for her, and presents to everyone. Ethel had a gold chain and eye-glass, which, it was hoped, might cure her of frowning and stooping, though her various ways of dangling her new possession, caused her to be so much teased by Flora

and Norman, that, but for regard to Margaret's feelings, she would not have worn it for three days.

To Mary was sent a daguerreotype of Harry, her glory and delight. Say, who would, that it had pig's eyes, a savage frown, a pudding chin, there were his own tight rings of hair, his gold-banded cap, his bright buttons, how could she prize it enough? She exhibited it to the little ones ten times a day, she kissed it night and morning, and registered her vow always to sleep with it under her 'pillow,' in a letter of thanks, which Margaret defended and despatched, in spite of Miss Winter's horrors at its disregard of orthography.

It was nearly the last letter before the Alcestis was heard of at Spithead. Then she sailed; she sent in her letters to Plymouth, and her final greetings by a Falmouth cutter—poor Harry's wild scrawl in pencil, looking very sea-sick.

'Dear papa and all, good-bye. We are out of sight of land. Three years, and keep up a good heart. I shall soon be all right.

'Your H. MAY.'

It was inclosed in Mr. Ernescliffe's envelope, and with it came tidings that Harry's brave spirit was not failing, even under untoward circumstances, but he had struggled on deck, and tried to write, when all his contemporaries had given in; in fact, he was a fine fellow—everyone liked him, and Captain Gordon, though chary of commendation, had held him up to the other youngsters as an example of knowing what a sailor was meant to be like.

Margaret smiled, and cried over the news when she imparted it—but all serenely—and though she was glad to be alone, and wrote journals for Alan, when she could not send letters, she exerted herself to be the same sister as usual to the rest of the household, and not to give way to her wandering musings.

From one subject her attention never strayed. Ethel had never found any lack of sympathy in her for her Cocks Moor pursuits; but the change now showed, that where once Margaret had been interested, merely as a kind sister, she now had a personal concern, and she threw herself into all that related to it as her own chief interest and pursuit—becoming the foremost in devising plans, and arranging the best means of using Mr. Ernescliffe's benefaction.

The Elwood family had grown in the good opinion of the Mays. Charity had hobbled to Church, leaning on her father's arm, and being invited to dinner in the kitchen, the acquaintance had been improved, and nurse herself had pronounced her such a tidy, good sort of body, that it was a pity she had met with such a misfortune. If Miss Ethel brought in nothing but the like of her, they should be welcome—poor thing, how tired she was!

Nurse's opinions were apt to be sagacious, especially when in the face of her prejudices, and this gave Margaret confidence.

Cherry proved to have been carefully taught by a good Clergyman and his wife, and to be of very different stamp from the persons to whom the girls were accustomed. They were charmed with her, and eagerly offered to supply her with books—respecting her the more when they found that Mr. Hazlewood had already lent her their chief favourites. Other and greater needs they had no power to fill up.

‘It is so lone without the Church bells, you see, Miss,’ said Mrs. Elwood. ‘Our tower had a real fine peal, and my man was one of the ringers. I seems quite lost without them, and there was Cherry, went a’most every day with the children.’

‘Every day!’ cried Mary, looking at her with respect.

‘It was so near,’ said Cherry, ‘I could get there easy, and I got used to it when I was at school.’

‘Did it not take up a great deal of time?’ said Ethel.

‘Why, you see, Ma’am, it came morning and night, out of working times, and I can’t be stirring much.’

‘Then you miss it sadly?’ said Ethel.

‘Yes, Ma’am, it made the day go on well like, and settled a body’s mind, when I fretted for what could not be helped. But I try not to fret after it now, and Mr. Hazlewood said, if I did my best wherever I was, the Lord would still join our prayers together.’

Mr. Hazlewood was recollected by Mr. Wilmot as an old College friend, and a correspondence with him fully confirmed the favourable estimate of the Elwoods, and was decisive in determining that the day-school, with Alan’s ten pounds as salary, and a penny a week from each child, should be offered to Cherry.

Mr. Hazlewood answered for her sound excellence, and aptitude for managing little children, though he did not promise genius, such as should fulfil the requirements of modern days. With these Cocks Moor could dispense at present; Cherry was humbly gratified, and her parents delighted with the honour and profit; there was a kitchen which afforded great facilities, and Richard and his carpenter managed the fitting to admiration; Margaret devised all manner of useful arrangements, settled matters with great earnestness, saw Cherry frequently, discussed plans, and learnt the history and character of each child, as thoroughly as Ethel herself. Mr. Ramsden himself came to the opening of the school, and said so much of the obligations of Cocks Moor to the young ladies, that Ethel would not have known which way to look, if Flora had not kindly borne the brunt of his compliments.

Everyone was pleased, except Mrs. Green, who took upon herself to set about various malicious reports of Cherry Elwood; but nobody cared for them, except Mrs. Elwood, who flew into such passions, that Ethel was quite disappointed in her, though not in Cherry, who meekly tried to silence her mother, begged the young

ladies not to be vexed, and showed a quiet dignity that soon made the shafts of slander fall inoffensively.

All went well; there was a school instead of a hubbub, clean faces instead of dirty, shining hair instead of wild elf-locks, orderly children instead of little savages. The order and obedience that Ethel could not gain in six months, seemed impressed in six days by Cherry; the neat work made her popular with the mothers, her firm gentleness won the hearts of the children, and the kitchen was filled not only with boys and girls from the quarry, but with some little ones from outlying cottages of Fordholm and Abbotstoke, and there was even a smart little farmer, who had been unbearable at home.

Margaret's unsuccessful Bath chair was lent to Cherry, and in it her scholars drew her to Stoneborough every Sunday, and slowly began to redeem their character with the ladies, who began to lose the habit of shrinking out of their way—the Stoneborough children did so instead; and Flora and Ethel were always bringing home stories of injustice to their scholars, fancied or real, and of triumphs in their having excelled any national school girl. The most stupid children at Cocksmoor always seemed to them wise in comparison with the Stoneborough girls, and the Sunday-school might have become to Ethel a school of rivalry, if Richard had not opened her eyes by a quiet observation, that the town girls seemed to fare as ill with her, as the Cocksmoor girls did with the town ladies. Then she caught herself up, tried to be candid, and found that she was not always impartial in her judgments. Why would competition mingle even in the best attempts?

Cherry did not so bring forward her scholars, that Ethel could have many triumphs of this dangerous kind. Indeed, Ethel was often vexed with her; for though she taught needlework admirably, and enforced correct reading, and reverent repetition, her strong provincial dialect was a stumbling-block; she could not put questions without book, and nothing would teach her Ethel's rational system of arithmetic. That she was a capital dame, and made the children very good, was allowed; but now and then, when mortified by hearing what was done at Stoneborough, Fordholm, or Abbotstoke, Ethel would make vigorous efforts, which resulted only in her coming home fuming at Cherry's 'outrageous dullness.'

These railings always hurt Margaret, who had made Cherry almost into a friend, and generally liked to have a visit from her during the Sunday, when she always dined with the servants. Then school questions, Cocksmoor news, and the tempers of the children, were talked over, and Cherry was now and then drawn into home reminiscences, and descriptions of the ways of her former school. There was no fear of spoiling her—notice from her superiors was natural to her, and she had the lady-likeness of womanly goodness, so as never to go beyond her own place. She had had

many trials, too, and Margaret learnt the true history of them, as she won Cherry's confidence, and entered into them, feeling their likeness, yet dissimilarity, to her own.

Cherry had been a brisk happy girl in a good place, resting in one of the long engagements that often extend over half the life of a servant, enjoying the nod of her baker as he left his bread, and her walk from Church with him on alternate Sundays. But poor Cherry had been exposed to the perils of window cleaning; and, after a frightful fall, had wakened to find herself in a hospital, and her severe sufferings had left her a cripple for life.

And the baker had not been an Alan Ernescliffe! She did not complain of him—he had come to see her, and had been much grieved, but she had told him she could never be a useful wife; and before she had used her crutches, he was married to her pretty fellow-servant.

Cherry spoke very simply; she hoped it was better for Long, and believed Susan would make him a good wife. Ethel would have thought she did not feel, but Margaret knew better.

She stroked the thin slight fingers, and gently said, 'Poor Cherry!' and Cherry wiped away a tear, and said, 'Yes, Ma'am, thank you, it is best for him. I should not have wished him to grieve for what cannot be helped.'

'Resignation is the great comfort.'

'Yes, Ma'am. I have a great deal to be thankful for. I don't blame no one, but I do see how some, as are married, seem to get to think more of this world; and now and then I fancy I can see how it is best for me as it is.'

Margaret sighed, as she remembered certain thoughts before Alan's return.

'Then, Ma'am, there has been such goodness! I did vex at being a poor helpless thing, nothing but a burthen on father; and when we had to go from home, and Mr. and Mrs. Hazlewood and all, I can't tell you how bad it was, Ma'am.'

'Then you are comforted now?'

'Yes, Ma'am,' said Cherry, brightening. 'It seems as if He had given me something to do, and there are you and Mr. Richard, and Miss Ethel, to help. I should like, please God, to be of some good to those poor children.'

'I am sure you will, Cherry; I wish I could do as much.'

Cherry's tears had come again. 'Ah! Ma'am, you—' and she stopped short, and rose to depart. Margaret held out her hand to wish her good-bye. 'Please, Miss, I was thinking how Mr. Hazlewood said that God fits our place to us, and us to our place.'

'Thank you, Cherry, you are leaving me something to remember.'

And Margaret lay questioning with herself, whether the school-mistress had not been the most self-denying of the two; but withal

gazing on the hoop of pearls which Alan had chosen as the ring of betrothal.

‘The Pearl of great price,’ murmured she to herself; ‘if we hold that, the rest will soon matter but little! It remaineth that both they that have wives, be as they that have none, and they that weep, as though they wept not, and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not! If ever Alan and I have a home together upon earth, may all too confident joy be tempered by the fears that we have begun with! I hope this probation may make me less likely to be taken up with the cares and pleasures of his position, than I might have been last year. He is one who can best help the mind to go truly upward! But oh! that voyage!’



CHAPTER XXIX.

‘Heart affluence in household talk,
From social fountains never dry.’

TENNYSON.

‘WHAT a bore!

‘What’s the matter now?’

‘Here has this old fellow asked me to dinner again!’

‘A fine pass we are come to!’ cried Dr. May, half amused, half irate. ‘I should like to know what I should have said at your age, if the head-master had asked me to dinner.’

‘Papa is not so very fond of dining at Dr. Hoxton’s,’ said Ethel.

‘A whipper-snapper schoolboy, who might be thankful to dine anywhere!’ continued Dr. May, while the girls burst out laughing, and Norman looked injured.

‘It is very ungrateful of Norman,’ said Flora; ‘I cannot see what he finds to complain of.’

‘You would know,’ said Norman, ‘if, instead of playing those perpetual tunes of yours, you had to sit it out in that perfumy drawing-room, without anything to listen to worth hearing. If I have looked over that Court Album once, I have a dozen times, and there is not another book in the place!’

‘I am glad there is not,’ said Flora. ‘I am quite ashamed to see you for ever turning over those old pictures! You cannot guess how stupid you look. I wonder Mrs. Hoxton likes to have you,’ she added, patting his shoulders between jest and earnest.

‘I wish she would not, then! It is only to escort you.’

‘Nonsense, Norman, you know better!’ cried Ethel. ‘You know it is for your own sake, and to make up for their injustice, that he invites you, or Flora either.’

'Hush, Ethel! he gives himself quite airs enough already,' said the Doctor.

'Papa!' said Ethel, in vexation, though he gave her a pinch to show it was all in good humour, while he went on, 'I am glad to hear they do leave him to himself in a corner. A very good thing, too! Where else should a great gawky schoolboy be?'

'Safe at home, where I wish he would let me be,' muttered Norman, though he contrived to smile, and followed Flora out of the room, without subjecting himself to the imputation of offended dignity.

Ethel was displeased, and began her defence: 'Papa! I wish—' and there she checked herself.

'Eh! Miss Ethel's bristles up!' said her father, who seemed in a somewhat mischievous mood of teasing.

'How could you, papa?' cried she.

'How could I what, Miss Etheldred?'

'Plague Norman,'—the words would come. "Accuse him of airs.'

'I hate to see young fellows above taking an honour from their elders,' said Dr. May.

'Now papa, papa, you know it is no such thing. Dr. Hoxton's parties are very dull—you know they are, and it is not fair on Norman. If he was set up and delighted at going so often, then you would call him conceited.'

'Conceit has a good many lurking places,' said Dr. May. 'It is harder to go and be overlooked, than to stay at home.'

'Now, papa, you are not to call Norman conceited!' cried Ethel. 'You don't believe that he is any such thing.'

'Why, not exactly,' said Dr. May, smiling. 'The boy has missed it marvellously; but, you see, he has everything that subtle imp would wish to feed upon, and it is no harm to give him a lick with the rough side of the tongue, as your canny Scots grandfather used to say.'

'Ah! if you knew, papa—' began Ethel.

'If I knew?'

'No, no, I must not tell.'

'What, a secret, is there?'

'I wish it was not; I should like to tell you very much, but then, you see, it is Norman's, and you are to be surprised.'

'Your surprise is likely to be very much like Blanche's birthday presents, a stage aside.'

'No, I *am* going to keep it to myself.'

Two or three days after, as Ethel was going to the school-room after breakfast, Dr. May beckoned her back to the dining-room, and with his merry look of significance, said, 'Well, ma'am, I have found out your mystery!'

'About Norman? Oh papa! Did he tell you?'

‘When I came home from the hospital last night, at an hour when all respectable characters, except doctors and police, should be in their warm beds, I beheld a light in Norman’s window, so methought I would see what Gravity was doing out of his bed at midnight—’

‘And you found him at his Greek—’

‘So that was the meaning of his looking so lank and care-worn, just as he did last year, and he the prince of the school! I could have found it in my heart to fling the books at his head!’

‘But you consent, don’t you, to his going up for the scholarship?’

‘I consent to anything, as long as he keeps within due bounds, and does not work himself to death. I am glad of knowing it, for now I can put a moderate check upon it.’

‘And did he tell you all about it?’

‘He told me he felt as if he owed it to us to gain something for himself, since I had given up the Randall to gratify him—a pretty sort of gratification.’

‘Yes, and he will be glad to get away from school. He says he knows it is bad for him—as it is uncomfortable to be singled out in the way Dr. Hoxton does now. ‘You know,’ pleaded Ethel, ‘it is not ingratitude or elation, but it is, somehow, not *nice* to be treated as he is, set apart from the rest.’

‘True; Dr. Hoxton never had taste or judgment. If Norman were not a *lusus naturæ*,’ said Dr. May, hesitating for a word, ‘his head would have been turned long ago. And he wants companions too—he has been forced out of boyhood too soon, poor fellow—and Harry gone too. He does not get anything like real relaxation, and he will be better among youths than boys. Stoneborough will never be what it was in my time!’ added the Doctor, mournfully. ‘I never thought to see the poor old place come to this; but there—when all the better class send their sons to the great public schools, and leave nothing but riff-raff here, one is forced, for a boy’s own sake, to do the same.’

‘Oh! I am so glad! Then you have consented to the rest of Norman’s scheme, and will not keep poor little Tom at school here without him?’

‘By what he tells me, it would be downright ruin to the boy. I little thought to have to take a son of mine away from Stoneborough; but Norman is the best judge, and he is the only person who seems to have made any impression on Tom, so I shall let it be. In fact,’ he added, half smiling, ‘I don’t know what I could refuse old June.’

‘That’s right!’ cried Ethel. ‘That is so nice! Then, if Norman gets the scholarship, Tom is to go to Mr. Wilmot first, and then to Eton!’

‘If Norman gains the scholarship but that is an if,’ said Dr. May

as though hoping for a loop-hole to escape offending the shade of Bishop Whichcote.

‘Oh, papa, you cannot doubt of that!’

‘I cannot tell, Ethel. He is *facile princeps* here in his own world, but we do not know how it may be when he is measured with public schoolmen, who have had more first-rate tutorship than poor old Hoxton’s.’

‘Ah! he says so, but I thought that was all his humility.’

‘Better he should be prepared. If he had had all those advantages—but it may be as well after all. I always had a hankering to have sent him to Eton, but your dear mother used to say it was not fair on the others. And now, to see him striving in order to give the advantage of it to his little brother! I only hope, Master Thomas is worthy of it—but it is a boy I can’t understand.’

‘Nor I,’ said Ethel; ‘he never seems to say anything he can help, and goes after Norman without talking to anyone else.’

‘I give him up to Norman’s management!’ said Dr. May. ‘He says the boy is very clever, but I have not seen it; and, as to more serious matters.—However, I must take it on Norman’s word, that he is wishing to learn truth. We made an utter mistake about him; I don’t know who is to blame for it.’

‘Have you told Margaret about Norman’s plan?’ asked Ethel.

‘No; he desired me to say nothing. Indeed, I should not like Tom’s leaving school to be talked of beforehand.’

‘Norman said he did not want Flora to hear, because she is so much with the Hoxtons, and he said they would all watch him.’

‘Aye, aye! and we must keep his secret. What a boy it is! But it is not safe to say conceited things. We shall have a fall yet, Ethel. Not seventeen, remember, and brought up at a mere grammar-school.’

‘But we shall still have the spirit that made him try,’ said Ethel, ‘and that is the thing.’

‘And, to tell you the truth,’ said the Doctor, lingering, ‘for my own part, I don’t care a rush for it!’ and he dashed off to his work, while Ethel stood laughing.

‘Papa was so very kind,’ said Norman, tremulously, when Ethel followed him to his room, to congratulate him on having gained his father’s assent, of which he had been more in doubt than she.

‘And you see he quite approves of the scheme for Tom, except for thinking it disrespect to Bishop Whichcote. He said he only hoped Tom was worthy of it.’

‘Tom!’ cried Norman. ‘Take my word for it, Ethel, Tom will surprise you all. He will beat us all to nothing, I know!’

‘If only he can be cured of—’

‘He will,’ said Norman, ‘when once he has outgrown his frights, and that he may do at Mr. Wilmot’s, apart from those fellows.’

When I go up for this scholarship, you must look after his lessons, and see if you are not surprised at his construing !'

'When you go. It will be in a month !'

'He has told no one, I hope.'

'No; but I hardly think he will bear not telling Margaret.'

'Well—I hate a thing being out of one's own keeping. I should not so much dislike Margaret's knowing, but I *won't* have Flora know—mind that, Ethel,' he said, with disproportionate vehemence.

'I only hope Flora will not be vexed. But, oh dear! how nice it will be when you have it, telling Meta Rivers, and all !'

'And this is a fine way of getting it, standing talking here. Not that I shall—You little know what public schools can do! But that is no reason against trying.'

'Good night, then. Only one thing more. You mean that, till further orders, Margaret should not know.'

'Of course,' said Norman, impatiently. 'She won't take any of Flora's silly affronts, and, what is more, she would not care half so much as before Alan Ernescliffe came.'

'Oh, Norman, Norman! I'm sure—'

'Why, it is what they always say. Everybody can't be first and Ernescliffe has the biggest half of her, I can see.'

'I am sure I did not,' said Ethel, in a mortified voice.

'Why, of course, it always comes of people having lovers.'

'Then I am sure I won't!' exclaimed Ethel.

Norman went into a fit of laughing.

'You may laugh, Norman, but I will never let papa or any of you be second to anyone!' she cried, vehemently.

A brotherly home-truth followed: 'Nobody asked you, sir, she said!' was muttered by Norman, still laughing heartily.

'I know,' said Ethel, not in the least offended, 'I am very ugly and very awkward, but I don't care. There never can be anybody in all the world that I shall like half as well as papa, and I am glad no one is ever likely to make me care less for him and Cocksmeer.'

'Stay till you are tried,' said Norman.

Ethel squeezed up her eyes, curled up her nose, showed her teeth in a horrible grimace, and made a sort of snarl: 'Yah! That's the face I shall make at them!' and then, with another good-night, ran to her own room.

Norman was, to a certain extent, right with regard to Margaret—her thoughts and interests had been chiefly engrossed by Alan Ernescliffe, and, so far drawn away from her own family, that when the *Alceste* was absolutely gone beyond all reach of letters for the present, Margaret could not help feeling somewhat of a void, and as if the home concerns were not so entire an occupation for her mind as formerly.

She would fain have thrown herself into them again, but she became conscious that there was a difference. She was still the

object of her father's intense tenderness and solicitude, indeed she could not be otherwise, but it came over her sometimes that she was less necessary to him than in the first year. He was not conscious of any change, and indeed, it hardly amounted to a change, and yet Margaret, lying inactive and thoughtful, began to observe that the fullness of his confidence was passing to Ethel. Now and then it would appear that he fancied he had told Margaret little matters, when he had really told them to Ethel—and it was Ethel who would linger with him in the drawing-room after the others had gone up at night, or who would be late at the morning's reading, and disarm Miss Winter, by pleading that papa had been talking to her. The secret they shared together was, of course, the origin of much of this; but also Ethel was now more entirely the Doctor's own than Margaret could be after her engagement; and there was a likeness of mind between the father and daughter that could not but develop more in this year, than in all Ethel's life, when she had made the most rapid progress. Perhaps, too, the Doctor looked on Margaret rather as the authority and mistress of his house, while Ethel was more of a playfellow; and thus, without either having the least suspicion that the one sister was taking the place of the other, and without any actual neglect of Margaret, Ethel was his chief companion.

'How excited and anxious Norman looks!' said Margaret, one day, when he had rushed in at the dinner-hour, asking for his father, and, when he could not find him, shouting out for Ethel. 'I hope there is nothing amiss. He has looked thin and worn for some time, and yet his work at school is very easy to him.'

'I wish there may be nothing wrong there again,' said Flora. 'There! there's the front door banging! He is off! Ethel!'—stepping to the door, and calling in her sister, who came from the street door, her hair blowing about with the wind.—'What did Norman want?'

'Only to know whether papa had left a note for Dr. Hoxton,' said Ethel, looking very confused and very merry.

'That was not all,' said Flora. 'Now don't be absurd, Ethel—I hate mysteries.'

'Last time I had a secret, you would not believe it,' said Ethel, laughing.

'Come!' exclaimed Flora, 'why cannot you tell us at once what is going on?'

'Because I was desired not,' said Ethel. 'You will hear it soon enough,' and she capered a little.

'Let her alone, Flora,' said Margaret. 'I see there is nothing wrong.'

'If she is desired to be silent there is nothing to be said,' replied Flora, sitting down again while Ethel ran away to guard her secret.

‘Absurd!’ muttered Flora. ‘I cannot imagine why Ethel is always making mysteries!’

‘She cannot help other people having confidence in her,’ said Margaret, gently.

‘She need not be so important, then,’ said Flora—‘always having private conferences with papa! I do not think it is at all fair on the rest.’

‘Ethel is a very superior person,’ said Margaret with half a sigh. Flora might toss her head, but she attempted no denial in words.

‘And,’ continued Margaret, ‘if papa does find her his best companion and friend, we ought to be glad of it.’

‘I do not call it just,’ said Flora.

‘I do not think it can be helped,’ said Margaret, ‘the best *must* be preferred.’

‘As to that, Ethel is often very ridiculous and silly.’

‘She is improving every day; and you know dear mamma always thought her the finest character amongst us.’

‘Then you are ready to be left out, and have your third sister always put before you?’

‘No, Flora, that is not the case. Neither she nor papa would ever be unfair; but, as she would say herself, what they can’t help, they can’t help; and, as she grows older, she must surpass me more and more.’

‘And you like it?’

‘I like it—when—when I think of papa, and of his dear, noble Ethel. I *do* like it, when I am not selfish.’

Margaret turned away her head, but presently looked up again.

‘Only, Flora,’ she said, ‘pray do not say one word of this, on any account, to Ethel. She is so happy with papa, and I would not, for anything, have her think I feel neglected, or had any jealousy.’

‘Ah,’ thought Flora, ‘you can give up sweetly, but you have Alan to fall back upon. Now I, who certainly have the best right, and a great deal more practical sense—’

Flora took Margaret’s advice, and did not reproach Ethel, for a little reflection convinced her that she should make a silly figure in so doing, and she did not like altercations.

It was the same evening that Norman came in from school with his hands full of papers, and, with one voice, his father and Ethel exclaimed, ‘You have them?’

‘Yes;’ and he gave a letter to his father, while Blanche, who had a very inquisitive pair of eyes, began to read from a paper he placed on the table.

‘Norman Walter, son of Richard and Margaret May, High-street, Doctor of Medicine, December 21st, 18—Thomas Ramsden.’

‘What is that for, Norman?’ and, as he did not attend, she called Mary to share her speculations, and spell out the words.

'Ha!' cried Dr. May, 'this is capital! The old Doctor seems not to know how to say enough for you. Have you read it?'

'No, he only told me he had said something in my favour, and wished me all success.'

'Success!' cried Mary. 'Oh, Norman, you are not going to sea, too?'

'No, no!' interposed Blanche, knowingly—'he is going to be married. I heard nurse wish her brother success when he was going to marry the washerwoman with a red face.'

'No,' said Mary, 'people never are married till they are twenty.'

'But I tell you,' persisted Blanche, 'people always write like this, in a great book in Church, when they are married. I know, for we always go into Church with Lucy and nurse, when there is a wedding.'

'Well, Norman, I wish you success with the bride you are to court,' said Dr. May—much diverted with the young ladies' conjectures.

'But is it really?' said Mary, making her eyes as round as full moons.

'Is it really?' repeated Blanche—'Oh dear! is Norman going to be married? I wish it was to be Meta Rivers, for then I could always ride her dear little white pony.'

'Tell them,' whispered Norman, a good deal out of countenance, as he leant over Ethel, and quitted the room.

'Ethel cried, 'Now then!' and looked at her father, while Blanche and Mary reiterated inquiries—marriage, and going to sea, being the only events that, in their imagination, the world could furnish. Going to try for a Balliol scholarship! It was a sad falling off, even if they understood what it meant. The Doctor's explanations to Margaret had a tone of apology for having kept her in ignorance, and Flora said few words, but felt herself injured; she had nearly gone to Mrs. Hoxton that afternoon, and how strange it would have been if anything had been said to her of her own brother's projects, when she was in ignorance.

Ethel slipped away to her brother, who was in his own room, surrounded with books, flushed and anxious, and trying to glance over each subject on which he felt himself weak.

'I shall fail! I know I shall!' was his exclamation. 'I wish I had never thought of it!'

'What? did Dr. Hoxton think you not likely to succeed?' cried Ethel, in consternation.

'Oh! he said I was certain, but what is that? We Stoneborough men only compare ourselves with each other. I shall break down to a certainty, and my father will be disappointed.'

'You will do your best?'

'I don't know that. My best will all go away when it comes to the point.'

‘Surely not. It did not go away last time you were examined, and why should it now?’

‘I tell you, Ethel, you know nothing about it. I have not got up half what I meant to have done. Here, do take this book—try me whether I know this properly.’

So they went on, Ethel doing her best to help and encourage, and Norman in an excited state of restless despair, which drove away half his senses and recollection, and his ideas of the superior powers of public school-boys magnifying every moment. They were summoned down stairs to prayers, but went up again at once, and more than an hour subsequently, when their father paid one of his domiciliary visits, there they still were, with their Latin and Greek spread out, Norman trying to strengthen all doubtful points, but, in a desperate desultory manner, that only confused him more and more, till he was obliged to lay his head down on the table, shut his eyes, and run his fingers through his hair, before he could recollect the simplest matter; his renderings alternated with groans, and, cold as was the room, his cheeks and brows were flushed and burning.

The doctor checked all this, by saying, gravely and sternly, ‘This is not right, Norman. Where are all your resolutions?’

‘I shall never do it. I ought never to have thought of it! I shall never succeed!’

‘What, if you do not?’ said Dr. May, laying his hand on his shoulder.

‘What! why Tom’s chance lost—you will all be mortified,’ said Norman, hesitating in some confusion.

‘I will take care of Tom,’ said Dr. May.

‘And he will have been foiled!’ said Ethel.

‘If he is?’

The boy and girl were both silent.

‘Are you striving for mere victory’s sake, Norman?’ continued his father.

‘I thought not,’ murmured Norman.

‘Successful or not, you will have done your utmost for us. You would not lose one jot of affection, or esteem, and Tom shall not suffer. Is it worth this agony?’

‘No, it is foolish,’ said Norman, with trembling voice, almost as if he could have burst into tears. He was quite unnerved by the anxiety and toil with which he had overtaken himself, beyond his father’s knowledge.

‘Oh! papa!’ pleaded Ethel, who could not bear to see him pained.

‘It is foolish,’ continued Dr. May, who felt it was the moment for bracing severity. ‘It is rendering you unmanly. It is wrong. Again Ethel made an exclamation of entreaty.

‘It is wrong, I know,’ repeated Norman; ‘but you don’t know what it is to get into the spirit of the thing.’

‘Do you think I do not?’ said the Doctor; ‘I can tell exactly what you feel now. If I had not been an idle dog, I should have gone through it all many more times.’

‘What shall I do?’ asked Norman, in a worn-out voice.

‘Put all this out of your mind, sleep quietly, and don’t open another book.’

Norman moved his head, as if sleep were beyond his power.

‘I will read you something to calm your tone,’ said Dr. May, and he took up a Prayer-Book. ‘“Know ye not, that they which run in a race, run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery, is temperate in all things.” Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible.” And, Norman, that is not the struggle where the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong; nor the contest, where the conqueror only wins vanity and vexation of spirit.’

Norman had cast down his eyes, and hardly made answer, but the words had evidently taken effect. The Doctor only further bade him good night, with a whispered blessing, and, taking Ethel by the hand, drew her away.

When they met the next morning, the excitement had passed from Norman’s manner, but he looked dejected and resigned. He had made up his mind to lose, and was not grateful for good wishes; he ought never to have thought, he said, of competing with men from public-schools, and he knew his return of love of vain-glory deserved that he should fail. However, he was now calm enough not to be likely to do himself injustice by nervousness, and Margaret had hopes that Richard’s steady equable mind, would have a salutary influence. So, commending Tom’s lessons to Ethel, and hearing, but not marking, countless messages to Richard, he set forth upon his *emprise*, while his anxiety seemed to remain as a legacy for those at home.

Poor Dr. May confessed that his practice by no means agreed with his precept, for he could think of nothing else, and was almost as bad as Norman, in his certainty that the boy would fail from mere nervousness. Margaret was the better companion for him now, attaching less intensity of interest to Norman’s success, than did Ethel; she was the more able to compose him, and cheer his hopes.

CHAPTER XXX.

'Weary soul, and burdened sore,
 Labouring with thy secret load,
 Fear not all thy griefs to pour
 In this heart, love's true abode.'

LYRA INNOCENTIUM.

TEA had just been brought in on the eighth evening from Norman's departure, when there was a ring at the bell. There was a start, and look of expectation. 'Only a patient,' said the Doctor; but it surely was not for that reason that he rose with so much alacrity and opened the door, nor was 'Well, old fellow?' the greeting for his patients—so everybody sprang after him, and beheld something tall taking off a coat, while the voice said, 'I have got it.'

The mass of children rushed back to Margaret, screaming, 'He has got it!' and then Aubrey trotted out into the hall again to see what Norman had got.

'A happy face at least,' said Margaret, as he came to her. And that was not peculiar to Norman. The radiance had shone out upon everyone in that moment, and it was one buzz of happy exclamation, query and answer—the only tone of regret when Mary spoke of Harry, and all at once took up the strain—how glad poor Harry would be. As to the examination, that had been much less difficult than Norman had expected; in fact, he said, it was lucky for him that the very subjects had been chosen in which he was most up—luck which, as the Doctor could not help observing, generally did attend Norman. And Norman had been so happy with Richard; the kind, wise, elder brother had done exactly what was best for him in soothing his anxiety, and had fully shared his feelings, and exulted in his success. Margaret had a most triumphant letter, dwelling on the abilities of the candidates whom Norman had outstripped, and the idea that every one had conceived of his talent. 'Indeed,' wrote Richard, 'I fancy the men had never believed that I could have a clever brother. I am glad they have seen what Norman can do.'

Margaret could not help reading this aloud, and it made Norman blush with the compunction that Richard's unselfish pride in him always excited. He had much to tell of his ecstasy with Oxford. Stoneborough Minster had been a training in appreciation of its heavy beauty, but the essentially prosaic Richard had never prepared him for the impression that the Reverend old University made on him, and he was already, heart and soul, one of her most loyal and loving sons, speaking of his College and of the whole University as one who had a right of property in them, and looking, all the time, not elated, but contented, as if he had found his sphere and was satisfied. He had seen Cheviot, too, and had been very

happy in the renewed friendship; and had been claimed as a cousin by a Balliol man, a certain Norman Ogilvie, a name well known among the Mays. 'And how has Tom been getting on?' he asked when he returned to home affairs.

'Oh! I don't know,' said Ethel. 'He will not have my help'

'Not let you help him!' exclaimed Norman.

'No. He says he wants no girls,' said Ethel, laughing.

'Foolish fellow!' said Norman. 'I wonder what sort of work he has made.'

'Very funny, I should think,' said Ethel, 'judging by the verses I could see.'

The little pale rough-haired Tom, in his perpetual coating of dust, softly crept into the room, as if he only wanted to elude observation; but Mary and Blanche were at once vociferating their news in his ears, though with little encouragement—he only shook them off abruptly, and would not answer when they required him to be glad.

Norman stretched out his arm, intercepting him as he was making for his hiding-place behind Dr. May's arm-chair.

'Come, August, how have things gone on?'

'Oh! I don't know.'

'What's your place?'

'Thirteenth!' muttered Tom in his throat, and well he might, for two or three voices cried out that was too bad, and that it was all his own fault, for not accepting Ethel's help. He took little heed, but crept to his corner without another word, and Mary knew she should be thumped, if she should torment him there.

Norman left him alone, but the coldness of the little brother for whom he had worked, gave a greater chill to his pleasure than he could have supposed possible. He would rather have had some cordiality on Tom's part, than all the congratulations that met him the next day.

He could not rest contented while Tom continued to shrink from him, and he was the more uneasy when, on Saturday morning, no calls from Mary availed to find the little boy, and bring him to the usual reading and Catechism.

Margaret decided that they must begin without him, and poor Mary's verse was read, in consequence, with a most dolorous tone. As soon as the books were shut, she ran off, and a few words passed among the elder ones about the truant—Flora opining that the Andersons had led him away; Ethel suggesting that his gloom must arise from his not being well; and Margaret looking wistfully at Norman, and saying she feared they had judged much amiss last spring.

Norman heard in silence, and walked thoughtfully into the garden. Presently he caught Mary's voice in expostulation: 'How could you not come to read!'

Girls' work!' growled another voice, out of sight

But Norman, and Richard, and Harry, always come to the reading. Everybody ought.'

Norman, who was going round the shrubs that concealed the speakers from him, here lost their voices, but, as he emerged in front of the old tool-house, he heard a little scream from Mary, and, at the same moment, she darted back, and fell over a heap of cabbage-stumps in front of the old tool-house. It was no small surprise to her to be raised by him, and tenderly asked whether she were hurt. She was not hurt, but she could not speak without crying, and when Norman begged to hear what was the matter, and where Tom was, she would only plead for him—that he did not intend to hurt her, and that she had been teasing him. What had he done to frighten her? Oh! he had *only* run at her with a hoe, because she was troublesome; she did not mind it, and Norman must not—and she clung to him as if to keep him back, while he pursued his researches in the tool-house, where, nearly concealed by a great bushel-basket, lurked Master Thomas, crouching down, with a volume of Gil Blas in his hand.

'You here! Tom! What have you hidden yourself here for? What can make you so savage to Mary?'

'She should not bother me,' said Tom, sulkily.

Norman sent Mary away, pacifying her by promises that he would not revenge her quarrel upon Tom, and then, turning the basket upside down, and perching himself astride on it, he began: 'That is the kindest, most forgiving little sister I ever did see. What possesses you to treat her so ill?'

'I wasn't going to hurt her.'

'But why drive her away? Why don't you come to read?' No answer; and Norman, for a moment, felt as if Tom were really hopelessly ill-conditioned and sullen, but he persevered in restraining his desire to cuff the ill-humour out of him, and continued: 'Come! there's something wrong, and you will never be better till it is out. Tell me—don't be afraid. Those fellows have been at you again?'

He took Tom by the arm to draw him nearer, but a cry and start of pain were the result. 'So they have licked you? Eh? What have they been doing?'

'They said they would spiflicate me if I told!' sighed Tom.

'They shall never do anything to you—' and by-and-by, a sobbing confession was drawn forth, muttered at intervals, as low as if Tom expected the strings of onions to hear and betray him to his foes. Looking on him as a deserter, these town-boys had taken advantage of his brother's absence, to heap on him every misery they could inflict. There had been a wager between Edward Anderson and Sam Axworthy as to what Tom could be made to do, and his personal timidity made him a miserable victim, not merely beaten and bruised, but forced to transgress every rule of right and wrong

that had been enforced on his conscience. On Sunday, they had profited by the absence of their Dux, to have a jollification at a little public-house, not far from the playing-fields; and here had Tom been dragged in, forced to partake with them, and frightened with threats that he had treated them all, and was liable to pay the whole bill, which, of course, he firmly believed, as well as that he should be at least half-murdered if he gave his father any suspicion that the whole had not been consumed by himself. Now, though poor Tom's conscience had lost many scruples during the last spring, the offence, into which he had been forced, was too heinous to a child brought up as he had been, to be palliated even in his own eyes. The profanation of Sunday, and the carousal in a public-house, had combined to fill him with a sense of shame and degradation, which was the real cause that he felt himself unworthy to come and read with his sisters. His grief and misery were extreme, and Norman's indignation was such as could find no utterance. He sat silent, quivering with anger, and clenching his fingers over the handle of the hoe.

'I knew it!' sighed Tom. 'None of you will ever speak to me again!'

'You! Why, August, man, I have better hopes of you than ever. You are more really sorry now than ever you were before.'

'I had never been at the Green Man before,' said poor Tom, feeling his future life stained.

'You never will again!'

'When you are gone—' and the poor victim's voice died away.

'Tom, you will not stay after me. It is settled that when I go to Balliol, you leave Stoneborough, and go to Mr. Wilmot as pupil. Those scamps shall never have you in their clutches again.'

It did not produce the ecstacy Norman had expected. The boy still sat on the ground, staring at his brother, as if the good news hardly penetrated the gloom; and, after a disappointing silence, recurred to the most immediate cause of distress: 'Eight shillings and tenpence half-penny! Norman, if you would only lend it to me, you shall have all my tin till I have made it up—sixpence a week, and half-a-crown on New Year's Day.'

'I am not going to pay Mr. Axworthy's reckoning,' said Norman, rather angrily. 'You will never be better till you have told my father the whole.'

'Do you think they will send in the bill to my father?' asked Tom, in alarm.

'No, indeed! that is the last thing they will do,' said Norman; but I would not have you come to him only for such a sneaking reason.'

'But the girls would hear it. Oh! if I thought Mary and Margaret would ever hear it—Norman, I can't—'

Norman assured him that there was not the slightest reason

that these passages should ever come to the knowledge of his sisters Tom was excessively afraid of his father, but he could not well be more wretched than he was already; and he was brought to assent when Norman showed him that he had never been happy since the affair of the blotting-paper, when his father's looks and tones had become objects of dread in his guilty conscience. Was not the only means of recovering a place in papa's esteem to treat him with confidence?

Tom answered not, and would only shudder when his brother took upon him to declare that free confession would gain pardon even for the doings at the Green Man.

Tom had grown stupified and passive, and his sole dependence was on Norman, so, at last, he made no opposition when his brother offered to conduct him to his father and speak for him. The danger now was that Dr. May should not be forthcoming, and the elder brother was as much relieved, as the younger was dismayed, to see, through the drawing-room window, that he was standing beside Margaret.

'Papa, can you come and speak to me,' said Norman, 'at the door?'

'Coming! What now?' said the Doctor, entering the hall. 'What, Tom, my boy, what is it?' as he saw the poor child, white, cold, almost sick with apprehension, with every pulse throbbing, and looking positively ill. He took the chilly, damp hand, which shook nervously, and would fain have withdrawn itself.

'Come, my dear, let us see what is amiss;' and before Tom knew what he was doing, he had seated him on his knee, in the arm-chair in the study, and was feeling his pulse. 'There, rest your head! Has it not been aching all day?'

'I do not think he is ill,' said Norman; 'but there is something he thinks I had better tell you.'

Tom would fain have been on his feet, yet the support of that shoulder was inexpressibly comfortable to his aching temples, and he could not but wait for the shock of being roughly shaken and put down. So, as his brother related what had occurred, he crouched and trembled more and more on his father's breast, till, to his surprise, he found the other arm passed round him in support, drawing him more tenderly close.

'My poor little fellow!' said Dr. May, trying to look into the drooping face, 'I grieve to have exposed you to such usage as this! I little thought it of Stoneborough fellows!'

'He is very sorry,' said Norman, much distressed by the condition of the culprit.

'I see it—I see it plainly,' said Dr. May. 'Tommy, my boy why should you tremble when you are with me?'

'He has been in great dread of your being displeased.'

'My boy, do you not know how I forgive you?'

Tom clung round his neck, as if to steady himself. 'Oh! papa I thought you would never—'

'Nay, you need never have thought so, my boy? What have I done that you should fear me?'

Tom did not speak, but nestled up to him with more confidence; 'There! that's better! Poor child! what he must have suffered! He was not fit for the place! I had thought him looking ill. Little did I guess the cause.'

'He says his head has ached ever since Sunday,' said Norman; 'and I believe he has hardly eaten or slept properly since.'

'He shall never be under their power again! Thanks to you, Norman. Do you hear that, Tommy?'

The answer was hardly audible. The little boy was already almost asleep, worn out with all he had undergone. Norman began to clear the sofa, that they might lay him down, but his father would not hear of disturbing him, and, sending Norman away, sat still for more than an hour, until the child slowly awoke, and scarcely recalling what had happened, stood up between his father's knees, rubbing his eyes, and looking bewildered.

'You are better now, my boy?'

'I thought you would be very angry,' slowly murmured Tom, as the past returned on him.

'Never, while you are sorry for your faults, and own them freely.'

'I'm glad I did,' said the boy, still half asleep. 'I did not know you would be so kind.'

'Ah! Tom, I fear it was as much my fault as yours, that you did not know it. But, my dear, there is a pardon that can give you better peace than mine.'

'I think,' muttered Tom, looking down—'I think I could say my prayers again now, if—'

'If what, my dear?'

'If you would help me, as mamma used—'

There could be but one response to this speech.

Tom was still giddy and unwell, his whole frame affected by the troubles of the last week, and Dr. May arranged him on the sofa, and desired him to be quiet, offering to send Mary to be his companion. Tom was languidly pleased, but renewed his entreaty, that his confession might be a secret from his sisters. Dr. May promised, and Mary, quite satisfied at being taken into favour, asked no questions, but spent the rest of the morning in playing at draughts with him, and, in having inflicted on her the history of the Bloody Fire King's Ghost—a work of Tom's imagination, which he was wont to extemporize, to the extreme terror of much enduring Mary.

When Dr. May had called Mary, he next summoned Norman, who found him in the hall, putting on his hat, and looking very stern and determined.

‘Norman!’ said he, hastily, ‘don’t say a word—It must be done—Hoxton must hear of this.’

Norman’s face expressed utter consternation.

‘It is not your doing. It is no concern of yours,’ said Dr. May, walking impetuously into the garden. ‘I find my boy ill, broken down, shattered—it is the usage of this crew of fellows—what right have I to conceal it—leave other people’s sons to be so served?’

‘I believe they did so to Tom out of ill-will to me,’ said Norman, ‘and because they thought he had ratted.’

‘Hush! don’t argue against it,’ said Dr. May, almost petulantly. ‘I have stood a great deal to oblige you, but I cannot stand this. When it is a matter of corruption, base cruelty—no, Norman, it is not right—not another word!’

Norman’s words had not been many, but he felt a conviction that, in spite of the dismay and pain to himself, Dr. May ought to meet with submission to his judgment, and he acquiesced by silence.

‘Don’t you see,’ continued the Doctor; ‘if they act thus, when your back is turned, what is to happen next half? ’Tis not for Tom’s sake, but how could we justify it to ourselves, to expose other boys to this usage?’

‘Yes,’ said Norman, not without a sigh. ‘I suppose it must be.’

‘That is right,’ said Dr. May, as if much relieved. ‘I knew you must see it in that light. I do not mean to abuse your confidence.’

‘No, indeed,’ answered Norman, warmly.

‘But you see yourself, that where the welfare of so many is at stake, it would be wickedness—yes, wickedness to be silent. Could I see that little fellow prostrated; trembling in my arms, and think of those scamps inflicting the same on other helpless children—away from their homes!’

‘I see, I see!’ said Norman, carried along by the indignation and tenderness that agitated his father’s voice in his vehemence—‘it is the only thing to be done.’

‘It would be sharing the guilt to hide it,’ said Dr. May.

‘Very well,’ said Norman, still reluctantly. ‘What do you wish me to do? You see, as Dux, I know nothing about it. It happened while I was away.’

‘True, true,’ said his father. ‘You have learnt it as brother not as senior boy. Yes, we had better have you out of the matter. It is I who complain of their usage of my son.’

‘Thank you,’ said Norman, with gratitude.

‘You have not told me the names of these fellows. No, I had best not know them.’

‘I think it might make a difference,’ hesitated Norman.

‘No, no, I will not hear them. It ought to make none. The fact is the same, be they who they may.’

The Doctor let himself out at the garden gate, and strode off at a rapid pace, conscious perhaps, in secret, that if he did not at once

yield to the impulse of resentment, good-nature would overpower the sense of justice. His son returned to the house with a heavy sigh, yet honouring the generosity that had respected his scruples when merely his own worldly loss was involved, but set them aside when the good of others was concerned. By-and-by Dr. May reappeared. The headmaster had been thoroughly roused to anger, and had begged at once to examine May junior, for whom his father was now come.

Tom was quite unprepared for such formidable consequences of his confession, and began by piteous tears and sobs, and when these had, with some difficulty, been pacified, he proved to be really so unwell and exhausted, that his father could not take him to Minster street, and was obliged to leave him to his brother's keeping, while he returned to the school.

Upon this, Dr. Hoxton came himself, and the sisters were extremely excited and alarmed by the intelligence that he was in the study with papa and Tom.

Then away went the gentlemen; and Mary was again called to comfort Tom, who, broken down into the mere longing for sympathy, sobbed out all his troubles to her, while her eyes expanded more and more in horror, and her soft heart giving way, she cried quite as pitifully, and a great deal more loudly; and so the other sisters learnt the whole, and Margaret was ready for her father, when he came in, in the evening, harassed and sorrowful. His anger was all gone now, and he was excessively grieved at finding that the ringleaders, Samuel Axworthy and Edward Anderson, could, in Dr. Hoxton's opinion, receive no sentence but expulsion, which was to be pronounced on them on Monday.

Sam Axworthy was the son of a low, uneducated man, and his best chance had been the going to this school; but he was of a surly, obstinate temper, and showed so little compunction that even such superabundant kindness as Dr. May's, could not find compassion for him; especially since it had appeared that Tom had been by no means the only victim, and that he had often been the promoter of the like mal-practices, which many boys were relieved to be forced to expose.

For Edward Anderson, however, or rather for his mother, Dr. May was very sorry, and had even interceded for his pardon; but Dr. Hoxton, though slow to be roused, was far less placable than the other Doctor, and would not hear of anything but the most rigorous justice.

'Poor Mrs. Anderson, with her pride in her children!' Flora spoke it with a shade of contemptuous pity, but it made her father groan.

'I shall never be able to look in her face again! I shall never see that boy without feeling that I have ruined him.'

'He needed nobody to do that for him,' said Flora.

‘With every disadvantage!’ continued Dr. May; ‘unable even to remember his father! Why could I not be more patient and forbearing?’

‘Oh! papa!’ was the general cry—Norman’s voice giving decision to the sisters’ exclamation.

‘Perhaps,’ said Margaret, ‘the shock may be the best thing for him.’

‘Right, Margaret,’ said her father. ‘Sometimes such a thing is the first that shows what a course of evil really is.’

‘They are an affectionate family too,’ said Margaret, ‘and his mother’s grief may have an effect on him.’

‘If she does not treat him as an injured hero,’ said Flora; ‘besides, I see no reason for regret. These are but two, and the school is not to be sacrificed to them.’

‘Yes,’ said Norman; ‘I believe that Ashe will be able to keep much better order without Axworthy. It is much better as it is, but Harry will be very sorry to hear it, and I wish this half was over.’

Poor Mrs. Anderson! her shower of notes rent the heart of the one Doctor, but were tossed carelessly aside by the other. On that Sunday, Norman held various conversations with his probable successor, Ashe, a gentle, well-disposed boy, hitherto in much dread of the post of authority, but owning, that, in Axworthy’s absence, the task would be comparatively easy, and that Anderson would probably originate far less mischief.

Edward Anderson himself fell in Norman’s way in the street, and was shrinking aside, when a word, of not unfriendly greeting, caused him to quicken his steps, and say, hesitatingly, ‘I say, how is August?’

‘Better, thank you; he will be all right in a day or two.’

‘I say, we would not have bullied him so, if he had not been in such a fright at nothing.’

‘I dare say not.’

‘I did not mean it all, but that sort of thing makes a fellow go on,’ continued Edward, hanging down his head, very sorrowful and downcast.

‘If it had only been fair bullying; but to take him to that place—to teach him falsehood—’ said Norman.

Edward’s eyes were full of tears; he almost owned the whole. He had not thought of such things, and then Axworthy—It was more evident from manner, than words, that the boy did repent, and was greatly overcome both by his own disgrace, and his mother’s distress, wishing earnestly to redeem his character, and declaring, from the bottom of his heart, that he would avoid his former offences. He was emboldened at last to say, with hesitation, ‘Could not you speak to Doctor Hoxton for me?’

‘My father has said all he could in your behalf.’

Edward's eye glanced towards Norman in wonder, as he recollected that the Mays must know that a word from him would have saved Norman from unjust punishment, and the loss of the scholarship, and he said, 'good night,' and turned aside to his own home, with a heavy sigh.

Norman took another turn, looked up at the sky, twisted his hands together in perplexity, mumbled something about hating to do a thing when it was all for no use, and then marched off towards Minster-street, with a pace like his father's the day before.

When he came forth again from Dr. Hoxton's study, he did not believe that his intercession had produced the least effect, and there was a sense of vexation at the position which he had assumed. He went home, and said nothing on the subject; but when, on Monday, the school was assembled, and the judgment announced, it was Axworthy alone whose friends had been advised to remove him.

Anderson received a severe punishment, as did all those who had shared in the revel at the Green Man. Even Tom, and another little boy, who had been likewise drawn in, were obliged to stay within narrow bounds, and to learn heavy impositions; and a stern reprimand and exhortation were given to the school collectively. Anderson, who had seen from the window that turn towards Minster-street, drew his own conclusions, and was not insensible to the generosity that had surpassed his hopes, though to his faltering attempt at thanks, Norman replied that he did not believe it was owing to him, and never exposed himself to Flora's wonder, by declaring at home what he had done.

So the last weeks of the half-year passed away with the boys in a subdued, but hopeful manner, and the reformation, under Norman's auspices, progressed so well, that Ashe might fairly expect to reap the benefit of the discipline, established at so much cost.

Mr. Wilmot had looked on, and given his help, but he was preparing to leave Stoneborough, and there was great concern at the parting with such a friend. Ethel, especially, mourned the loss to Cocks Moor, and, for though hers had been the executive part, his had been the head, and he was almost equally grieved to go from the newly-begun work.

Margaret lamented the loss of her kind counsellor, and the ready hearer of her anxieties for the children. Writing could ill supply the place of their conversations, and she feared likewise that her father would feel the want of his companionship. The promise of visits, and the intercourse kept up by Tom's passing to and fro, was the best consolation.

Poor Margaret had begun to flag, both in strength and spirits as winter approached, but there came a revival in the shape of 'Ship Letters!' Alan wrote cheerfully and graphically, with excellent accounts of Harry, who, on his side, sent very joyous and characteristic despatches, only wishing that he could present Mary with

all the monkeys and parrots he had seen at Rio, as well as the little ruby-crested humming-birds, that always reminded him of Miss Rivers.

With the Christmas holidays, Hector Ernescliffe came from Eton, as to a home, and was received by Margaret as a sort of especial charge. It was pretty to see how he turned to her as something peculiarly his own, and would sit on a footstool by her, letting himself be drawn into confidence, and dwelling on his brother's past doings, and on future schemes for Maplewood. For the rest, he restored to the house the atmosphere of boy, which had somewhat departed with Harry. Mary, who had begun to be tamed down, ran more wild than ever, to the utter despair of Miss Winter; and Tom, now that his connexion with the Whichcote foundation was over, and he was no more cowed by the sight of his tyrants, came out in a new light. He put on his boy-nature, rioted like the rest, acquired colour in his cheeks, divested his jacket of perpetual dust, had his hair cut, brushed up a crest on his head, and ran about no longer a little abject, but a merry lad.

Ethel said it was a change from Horrid-locks to Harfagre; Margaret said little, but, like her father, she blessed Norman in her heart for having given back the boy to his father's confidence, and saved him so far from the terrible course of deceit and corruption. She could not much take to heart the mad exploits of the so-called boys, even though she spent three hours in heart-beatings on Christmas Eve, when Hector, Mary, Tom, Blanche, and the dog Toby, were lost the whole day. However they did come back at six o'clock, having been deluded by an old myth of George Larkins, into starting for a common, three miles beyond Cocks Moor, in search of mistletoe, with scarlet berries, and yellow holly, with leaves like a porcupine! Failing these wonders, they had been contenting themselves with scarlet holly, in the Drydale plantations, when a rough voice exclaimed, 'Who gave you leave to take that?' whereupon Tom had plunged into a thicket, and nearly 'scratched out both his eyes;' but Hector boldly standing his ground, with Blanche in his hand, the woodman discovered that here was the Miss Mary, of whom his little girls talked so much, thereupon cut down the choicest boughs, and promised to leave a full supply at Dr. May's. Margaret could have been angry at the taking the young ladies on so mad a scheme, but then Mary was so happy, and as to Hector, how scold him, when he had lifted Blanche over every ditch, and had carried her home one mile on his back, and another, Queen's cushion fashion, between him and Mary?

Flora, meanwhile, went her own way. The desire of compensating for what had passed with Norman, led to great civilities from Dr. and Mrs. Hoxton, which nobody was at liberty to receive except Flora. Pretty, graceful and pleasing, she was a valuable companion to a gentle little, inane lady, with more time and money than

she knew what to do with ; and Mrs. Hoxton, who was of a superior grade to the Stoneborough ladies in general, was such a chaperon as Flora was glad to secure. Dr. May's old loyal feelings could not help regarding her notice of his daughter as a favour and kindness, and Margaret could find no tangible objections, nor any precedent from her mother's conduct, even had anyone had the power to interfere with one so quiet, reasonable and determined as Flora.

So the intimacy became closer and closer, and as the winter passed on, Flora gradually became established as the dear friend and assistant, without whom Mrs. Hoxton could give no party. Further, Flora took the grand step of setting up a copperplate and cards of 'Miss Flora May,' went out frequently on morning calls with Mrs. Hoxton and her bay horses, and when Dr. May refused his share of invitations to dinner with the neighbours in the country, Flora generally found that she could go under the Hoxtons' guardianship.

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